

The Humanist Pulpit

Series X

Number 10

Did Jesus Really Live?

a platform review of
Georg Brandes' recent book

"JESUS, A MYTH"



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Price Ten Cents

The First Unitarian Society
803 LaSalle Avenue,
Minneapolis, Minn.

This pamphlet contains an address delivered in the Garrick Theatre before the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, at its regular Sunday morning meeting, March 27, 1927, by the minister, John H. Dietrich, and is published for the purpose of reaching those people who are in sympathy with our work but are unable to attend our meetings.

The minister of the First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis is granted absolute freedom of thought and speech. The Sunday morning addresses are the expression of his individual convictions and he alone is responsible for them.

Twelve addresses are published during the church year from September to June, and subscriptions for the annual series are received at one dollar postpaid. If in addition the Sunday morning programs are desired, the subscription price for the two (addresses and programs) is two dollars. Address the Secretary, First Unitarian Society, 803 La Salle Avenue, Minneapolis, Minn.

Extra copies of this pamphlet and all others that are still in print may be procured from the above address for ten cents each, postpaid.

All of Mr. Dietrich's addresses are broadcast over WAMD (244 meters).

Did Jesus Really Live?

One of the most significant things about Christianity is that its origin is enveloped in such a cloud of haze, that it requires an unusual amount of faith to accept the accounts of it which the church teaches. Of course this is what one might expect in the case of a natural religion, but not in the case of Christianity which claims to be a supernaturally revealed religion. One would think that if God were going to reveal himself to mankind he would do it in such unmistakable terms that no man could doubt the reality of that revelation. And yet from the very beginning it has been so obscure that only the most credulous have been able to accept it. Christianity is supposed to have its origin in the person of Jesus, and yet it is exceedingly difficult to establish the fact that such a person ever lived. Jesus, himself, forms one of the most controversial aspects of the whole question of religion, and one which bristles with special difficulty through the lack of information accessible on the subject. Practically all the information about this person whose influence has so profoundly affected the civilized world is contained in four short essays of unequal value, teeming with contradictions and inconsistencies, and supplying Biblical scholars with a never-ending theme for discussion as to what may be accepted as authoritative and what is to be regarded as spurious. In all these finer points of criticism the general public, I think, has very little interest. But any man of average intelligence must at least be interested in the question as to whether Jesus was a God or a man or a myth.

It is interesting to note the gradual retreat of the more intelligent element in the Christian church from the position which was originally held. When Christianity was at its height Jesus was believed to be God, functioning in a human capacity in order to fulfill a special design of the Almighty. He was identical with the infinite God of the universe, a very part of the God-head, who for a short period put on the guise of man in order to effect his salvation. Then arose a party which thought of him, not as a part of the deity, but

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as a supreme revelation of the character of God; that is, by his beautiful life and sublime death he showed men what God really is. A third point of view is that accepted by the Unitarians of the last generation, and best expounded by Renan in his fascinating and famous book "The Life of Jesus." This attitude refuses to accept him as in any way connected with God, and believes instead that he was a human being, but of such unique dimensions that he touched the high water mark of morality, and remains even today the ideal figure of virtue, serving as a model for all mankind. Then came that group of higher critics of the last generation, such as Pfleiderer and Harnack and Estlin Carpenter, who said that the gospels do not give us a true account of his life at all but that they represent the idealization of a personality who left an unusual impression upon his age; and while they believe there is a historical residuum in these documents, it is difficult to know just what it is because it is so encrusted with super-imposed legend and myth. And now we have scholars on every hand denying the existence of Jesus as a historical character, and placing him in the same category as Apollo, Osirus, Mirthra, and other mythological religious heroes, and this assumption is by no means as ridiculous as the uninformed worshipper might at first believe.

I.

In fact it is to this last problem that most of the discussion about Jesus among scholars has shifted in modern times; and indeed there is no problem which is more widely discussed and which is attracting greater interest than the problem as to whether Jesus, the reputed founder of Christianity, ever really lived upon the earth. Is Jesus of Nazareth a historical individual, or is he purely a creation of fancy? Is he to be classed among those historical founders of religions who left such a strong impression upon their contemporaries that after their death their memory was held in peculiar reverence; or does he belong to those heroes of mythology, who never had any earthly existence except that created for them by the personifying fancy of naive and primitive people? This is the very interesting question that is discussed in the recent book by Georg Brandes, which I am to treat this morning. And the side of this question which the author

champions is suggested by the title—"Jesus, a Myth." He seeks to prove that the reputed founder of Christianity is purely a mythological figure.

Of course this is not by any means a new question. Two centuries ago certain French writers classed Christianity among the mythical religions and pushed the person of Jesus so far back in the shadows that he could no longer seriously be regarded as a figure of history. In 1835 under the influence of Strauss' "Leben Jesu," this theory was revived and received classic expression in the works of Bruno Bauer, who laid down the thesis that Jesus was not the founder of Christianity, but only its "fictitious product." For a while the discussion seemed to die out; but about twenty years ago the question was raised again, and for several years immediately preceding the war it was discussed with a seriousness and a fervor never before known. In England, Holland, France, Italy, and America there were numerous and influential advocates of the theory that Jesus is not a historical character; but only a creation of the human mind. In all of these countries a number of books were published on the subject and the theological magazines carried many articles on one side or the other. It was in Germany, however, that the question was most widely and earnestly discussed. Here under the lead of Dr. Arthur Drews, author of the famous book "The Christ Myth," it became almost a propaganda. For three years the pulpits of Germany discussed this question almost to the exclusion of all others; the theological journals apparently believed that their readers were more interested in this than in anything else; and enough books were published on the subject to constitute a library in themselves. In England the movement was led by the Honorable John M. Robertson, a famous rationalist, whose ideas may be found in the books in our church library entitled "Christianity and Mythology," "Pagan Christs," "The Jesus Problem," and "The Historical Jesus." The principal advocate of this doctrine in America is Prof. W. B. Smith, of Tulane University and author of "Ecce Deus," a clear exposition of the arguments of those who refuse to believe that Jesus ever lived.

Then came the war, and for a number of years the people of the civilized world were so engrossed in killing one

another and destroying the products of their civilization, that they forgot for the moment all about Jesus, or at least they were not interested in whether or not such a man ever lived. But now that the war is over and people have settled down and find time to interest themselves in speculative problems, this question has been revived. A number of books and articles have appeared within the last few years by men in every part of the world, the most interesting of which are "The Enigma of Jesus" by Dr. P. L. Couchoud which appeared about two years ago, and "Jesus, a Myth" by Georg Brandes, which was published within the last year. And when a man like Mr. Brandes, universally recognized as the greatest critic of modern times, holds, after complete and searching study of the evidence, that Jesus never existed as a man but is a wholly legendary figure, we must at least give the question serious consideration. Mr. Brandes maintains that popular history is full of legends which no good critic or historian accepts as true, and that among these is the legend of Jesus, which has no support in the evidence, but has been maintained, with all the force of dogma and superstition, by the powerful system of Christianity. Of course Mr. Brandes does not bring any new evidence to bear upon the subject. All that can be said in support of this theory was said some years ago by Drews and Robertson and this book adds little, if anything, to the argument. What is interesting in Brandes' book is the simple and concrete way in which he arranges and treats the evidence. The more voluminous books on the subject are terribly involved and make difficult reading for the ordinary man, while here we have a book that develops the argument in simple and concrete form which can be readily understood by the average reader.

It is a review of his argument that I wish to give you this morning. I have no desire to convince you of either its truth or falsity. I feel that I can deal with the subject in a purely open-minded fashion, although the very nature of the question makes the honest discussion of it very difficult. It reaches right down to the very root of people's religious and anti-religious prejudices. It is not strange, therefore, that no one has written a carefully considered, unpartisan treatment of the problem. All of the extreme and radical thinkers, especially those who delight in radicalism for its own

sake, have aligned themselves with the mythologists and do not very carefully consider the evidence. On the other hand those of Christian prejudice simply throw out of court and ridicule the arguments of the other side. Prof. Case of the University of Chicago attempts to be unprejudiced in his book entitled, "The Historicity of Jesus," but his treatment clearly indicates that he is biased in favor of what he calls "the historical Jesus of the liberal theology." In fact, his preface begins with this sentence, "The main purpose of the present volume is to set forth the evidence for believing in the historical reality of Jesus' existence upon earth." I should like to say that I feel myself capable at least of looking at the question absolutely without prejudice in the interest of truth. I have no desire to believe one thing or the other. I have a desire only to know the truth in regard to the matter. And I admit that it is impossible to establish the truth in this regard. No one can prove that Jesus really lived, and no one can disprove it. Some years ago there occurred a public debate upon this question between Mr. Mangasarian and Dr. Crapsey. Their addresses have been published. To read them is to show what I have said. Neither one has given us anything that can be considered convincing. And so I do not come here this morning with the desire to convince any one of you that Jesus really lived, or that he did not live. I merely want to summarize the evidence which Mr. Brandes presents, and if I have time, refer to the way in which these arguments are met, and perhaps give you my personal opinion in the matter.

II.

No doubt realizing the unusual prejudice attached to a subject of this kind, the author starts his book with a rigid quotation from William Lloyd Garrison, "I will be harsh as truth and as uncompromising as justice. I am in earnest. I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard." Then he has an introduction devoted to a treatment of the history of the William Tell legend. Here he tells us that for more than six hundred years the average man in Switzerland and elsewhere has never doubted that William Tell was a historical character because he was familiar with all the details of his parents, of his

birth, of the many wonderful achievements of his career, and of his death. In fact, there are in Switzerland a number of Tell chapels in which his deeds are glorified. And yet it is well known today that William Tell never existed, that there never was any bailiff by the name of Gessler, who plays an important role in the legend, and that the whole story about the foundation of the Swiss Confederation by the leaguers at Rutli is a legend. And in a similar way he would have us believe that, although for two thousand years the average man has never doubted that Jesus was a historical character because he was familiar with the details of his life also, and although a great religion traces its beginnings to his life, yet the fact is that Jesus never really existed, that there never was any crucifixion or resurrection, and that the whole story of the founding of Christianity as a result of this event is a legend. And perhaps this is not so important, for although William Tell is a legend, Schiller, through his beautiful tragedy of that name, written under the inspiration of Goethe, established the significance of Tell as a Swiss hero and a personification of the love of liberty for all time. Even though he never existed, he is and will remain an active ideal, and as a model will continue to rule the minds of men. And thus, also, suggests the author, has the ideal of Jesus, although belonging to the world of legend, exercised a tremendous influence on the spiritual life of Europe and America, and will continue to do so even though his historicity be entirely exploded.

This is followed by calling our attention to the universality of the ideas which are summed up in the life of Jesus. In a general way, every student of ancient religious rites knows very well that the ideal image of one unjustly tortured and martyred, of one tormented for the very reason that he is good and righteous, of one chosen as a victim by human malice and bearing his sufferings for the sake of the rest—that this image had been drawn with devoted passion long before the time when the historical Jesus is supposed to have come into the world. As Sir James Frazer, the foremost mythologist of today says in the *Golden Bough*: "The transfer of evil, the principle of vicarious suffering, is commonly understood and practiced by all races on a low level of intellectual culture. It occurs in the history of classic antiquity, while the

people were still in barbarism. The typical example is the sacrifice of Iphigenia." The cult of the Syrian god Attis was built around the idea of the cleansing of the soul by the shedding of blood. The figure of the suffering Messiah among the Jewish people was a personification of this same idea, and perhaps was the basis upon which the more general idea built its concrete Christ ideal. In other words the Christ figure as an ideal of superiority, of love for humanity, of charity and purity, as a vicarious sacrifice for the sins of others, was many centuries older than the noble minded Galilean man of the people who, nineteen hundred years ago, was said to have given historic embodiment to this prototype.

In a more particular way, when the gospel narratives are compared with narratives from other literatures it is found that every salient episode, miraculous or otherwise, in the career of Jesus corresponds to some episode in the myth of a god or semi-divine hero already current in this section of the world. The same thing is true of his teachings. Every precept that he uttered and every parable that he related corresponds to texts and stories in the Old Testament or the Talmud or the other ancient Mediterranean literature. Are we to say that all these other stories are fictions, but that those of the gospel are historic? Shall we not rather infer either that the latter borrowed from the earlier or that both are derived from a common source? For example: when we find that Apollo was the son of God, born of a virgin, are we to say that though this is a myth Jesus was really born of a virgin? When we find more than a dozen saviors in various parts of the world who were crucified, are we to say that, though these are myths, Jesus was really crucified? When we find that Mithra was buried in a cave are we to say, that though this is a myth, Jesus was really buried in a cave? When we find that Osiris arose from the dead after three days are we to believe that, though this is a myth, Jesus really rose from the dead? And thus we might speak of practically every episode in his career.

After suggesting in this way the universality of practically every event as well as every idea connected with the life of Jesus, our author proceeds to examine the literature which deals with his life. And first that of the non-Christian writ-

ers, both Jewish and Roman. The supposed Jewish witnesses are of course entirely eliminated. Such references as exist in the *Talmud* are all later than the appearance of the Christian literature, and are plainly derived from it. The wellknown passage in Josephus is, by admission of the most conservative clergymen, a Christian forgery; and this indeed is very significant, that the careful historian of that period of the Jewish people knew nothing of Jesus; and it is also very significant that Justin Martyr, writing in the second century makes a Jewish disputant say, "Ye follow an empty rumor and make a Christ for yourselves; if he were born and lived somewhere he is entirely unknown."

Among the Roman writers there are, as you know, but three references which are considered of little or no historical significance. In a letter to the emperor Trajan, Pliny the Younger says that the Christians sing hymns to "Christus as if he were a god." This, of course, is useless for historical purposes because many people have sung hymns to other gods, whom no one thinks of as historical persons. Suetonius in his history says that the Jews in Rome were incessantly rioting "under the instigation of one Chrestus." Apparently therefore, this Chrestus, whoever he may have been, was a Jew, and was then living in the city of Rome, else how could he have been instigating riots at that time. The other reference seems more important. It is found in the *Annals* of Tacitus and runs like this: "He from whom the name (Christianus) was derived, Chrestus, was put to death by the procurator, Pontius Pilatus in the reign of Tiberius." The genuineness of this passage has been seriously challenged, but even assuming it to be genuine it is shown by other passages that Tacitus never made an investigation of the origin and history of this sect, but that he was merely repeating what was currently believed among the Christians at that time, for it was written about A. D. 117-120.

He brings us next to the Biblical literature which may throw light on the problem, and this naturally falls into two groups—the Pauline literature and the Gospels. And his judgment of the Pauline literature is this: If the Epistles have any outstanding feature, it is the excessive devotion of Paul to his Christ; yet with the sole exception of his death, this remarkable writer never alludes to the career of the

earthly Jesus, never quotes a single saying from his lips, never avails himself of a single one of his teachings. He will argue a point laboriously when citation of a single word of Jesus would have settled the matter, but he never cites it. Now if Paul's Jesus was a man who had only recently died, a man who was living and teaching during his own youth, this attitude is beyond all explanation. Of course, one naturally wonders about whom or what Paul was speaking, and here our author gives the usual explanation of these scholars, namely—that Christianity found its seed and its main spirit in a fusion of the messiah of the prophets, Isaiah's servant of the lord, the persecuted righteous man of the Psalms, and the Wisdom of Solomon, into a single figure—that of Jehovah himself changed into a god that dies, rises again, and will return to sit in judgment of the world. And when Paul refers to the death, he may have had in mind that story in the *Talmud* which tells of a Jesus Ben Pandira, a worker of wonders, who had a following of five disciples, and who, about 100 B. C. was "hanged on a tree" on the eve of a Passover, and whose mother's name is given as Mary Magdalen.

This leaves us only the gospels, which we are told are the result of the common people's curiosity and desire for information, as well as their inability to achieve such spiritual heights as those attained and described by Paul. And so to use the author's words, "mystic and mythical stories about the birth of religious heroes and Herod's slaying of the children (in imitation of Pharaoh's attempt to slay the infant Moses); legends about the temptation of the devil; numerous striking saws and parables uttered by the wise men of the age; stories about a superior minded and highly superior man of the people; stories of miraculous cures and feats, symbols, visions, and so on—all of which was then boiled together into the strangely composed mess called the gospels." Now a logical way, he says, of finding what is really historical in these documents is to start by eliminating what cannot possibly be held such, and then see what remains. And when we do this, the outcome, he says, is the same as when Peer Gynt began to peel the onion by taking off one layer at a time. There was a "terrific number of them," and always he hoped that the core would come next. But in the

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end discovered to his great disgust that, in its innermost inwardness, the onion was nothing but layers. And thus will we find, he says, that the gospels are nothing but layers of unhistorical matter. But I would remind you here that there are scholars just as efficient and as devoted to the truth who believe that the gospels do contain a core of historical matter, as for instance the nine so-called "absolutely credible passages" to which I referred last week. These, they claim, cannot be mythical because they are derogatory to the accepted divine status of Jesus, and thus would never have been manufactured by his devoted followers. In other words, the compilers would have been glad to exclude them so they admitted them only because they knew them to be true. Of course the mythologists reject this theory because they claim that similar episodes occur in the careers of many divine heroes, such as Heracles and Apollo, who are admitted to be mythical.

So our author goes through the whole career of Jesus in the attempt to show that the various episodes are wholly unhistorical. First he takes up the birth stories, and shows them to be impossible, contradictory, and a composite of similar stories told of other heroes. All this we gladly admit on the basis of my address on the birth of Jesus, a few months ago. However, in this regard he speaks of two things that had not occurred to me. He presents rather good evidence that there was no such town as Nazareth at the dawn of the Christian era, and traces the name to Gen-Nesarat, that is Galilee; and another thing that I had never noticed, namely: that the name of Mary, his mother, is also mythological. It seems that in Asia the mother of God always bore the name beginning with the letters MA, as for instance Maya, the mother of Buddha, Maratala, the mother of Krishna, and many others mentioned by our author.

Then he takes up the story of the baptism and temptation and shows these to be pure legend founded upon common folklore and Old Testament texts. After this he treats the disciples and shows the contradictions in regard to the number as well as the names of these supposed followers. He next treats the mysticism of numbers, such as three and twelve and forty, all of which have an astrological significance. Jesus walks three times through Galilee, and three

times through Judea. The number of miracles wrought in each case are three. Three times he denounces Judas as the one who is to betray him, and three times Peter denies him. Jesus rises from the grave on the third day, and three times he lets himself be seen thereafter. And so on and so forth. His teaching also he shows to be merely a working over of the material in the Old Testament and some of the better known current morality of the Graeco-Roman world. I have not time to go into all these details; but I do want to speak for a moment of his treatment of the trial and crucifixion. The eminent French scholar Loisy, who, though abandoning much, yet holds to the historicity of Jesus, says that if this goes the crucifixion becomes a myth, and the historicity of Jesus goes with it.

Brandes seeks to show that the trial is a pure invention and takes place under conditions which could not possibly have existed, and that the crucifixion story was entirely pieced together from statements in the Old Testament, such as the piercing of the hands and the feet, the casting lots for his garments, the giving of gall and vinegar to drink—all these are quotations from the psalms and the prophets. So our author concludes "We can see nothing in this whole story but the gradual piecing together of a mosaic picture out of old quotations known by heart"; while the resurrection, he contends, is merely a recasting, to suit the situation, of stories about Adonis and Attis in Syria, and of similar religious formulations in Egypt, in which a young god by the harshness of fate was compelled to die in the flower of his youth, was mourned by women, buried in the earth, and again brought to life, whereupon the mourning turned into rejoicing.

In short, Mr. Brandes' argument is that the only documents which treat the figure of Jesus as a living personality are the gospels, and since practically all the data in these gospels, held to be historical by Christian people, are really adaptations of myths of much greater antiquity, therefore the personality of Jesus is taken to be as mythical as that of the gods of other religions. In other words, the contention is that when every salient item connected with the life of Jesus, both miraculous and non-miraculous, both in regard to his actions and his teachings, turns out to be more

or less clearly mythical, there is little left to entitle one to a belief in the historical existence of his personality. And the beginnings of Christianity he would find in the blending of pagan myth with Hebrew scripture which a little later centered itself in a personality which still later was believed to have been a historical character.

This, he says, is by no means an unusual occurrence. For thousands of years, longer even than the period thus far covered by Christianity, Isis and Horus were worshipped as the mother of God and the Divine Son; and yet no one nowadays believes in their actual existence. The greatest mystery celebrated annually in Egypt was the death and resurrection of Osiris. And yet no one today would think of Osiris as a historical character. To us the whole thing is nothing but an ancient and venerable myth. The fact that Prometheus was once regarded as the great benefactor of mankind, who had given us the great gift of fire, and who had paid with martyrdom for his love of man, cannot make any one nowadays believe that he ever lived and suffered. For thousands of years Apollo, the god of light and purity, was adored in innumerable temples. He had hosts of priests and priestesses, and he guided the destinies of men through his oracles. To this very day his name remains honored. But that he ever existed no one believes in this twentieth century. And thus, argues our author, the fact that Jesus has dominated the religion of the western world for two thousand years, that his life has been an inspiration and a comfort to millions of people, that his name is not only honored but adored by multitudes of men and women, does not mean that he ever really lived.

On the other hand, the fact that he never existed in no sense detracts from the power of his significance. Achilles, Ulysses, Hamlet, or Faust have just as much influence over the lives of men as if they had been historical characters, and whether or not they ever lived makes no difference in the reality of their personalities as we think about them in relation to our own lives. We know a great deal more about Ophelia and Margarite than we know about Mary and Martha in the New Testament, even though the latter may have been historical, and when it is a question of the effect of these lives upon our lives today, one is just as

effective as the other. It is the vividness with which a character is portrayed to us that gives it reality, and not the question as to whether it is fictitious or historical. And so Mr. Brandes would have us understand that the historicity of Jesus is really not a very important problem.

III.

I agree with practically everything Mr. Brandes says and yet believe that there is a historical residuum in all this literature which justifies a belief in the historical existence of Jesus of Nazareth. I have not time to give you the reasons for this conclusion, though they are mostly summed up in the fact that to my mind the mythological theory creates more problems than it solves. I believe that behind these gospels, as we have them today, are certain very primitive threads of oral tradition which were used as the basis of the production of these documents; and that, when we dig down underneath the super-imposed layers of myth and legend which were naturally woven in, we can find this vein of tradition which brings us very close to a historical character. The actual facts in that tradition are very meagre, and run something like this: The Jews are looking for a Messiah, that is the one subject that is in the air, the coming of him who shall establish the messianic kingdom, the kingdom of God, as it came to be called. John the Baptist goes about preaching his coming. A young carpenter of Nazareth (We cannot be sure of his name, for Jesus is a symbolic term, meaning "savior") goes with some of his countrymen to hear John the Baptist, and identifies himself with the new movement inaugurated by the prophet. Soon John is thrown into prison, and the work is taken up by this young man and he begins preaching on his own account. His neighbors deride and insult him, and his family repudiates him; but the common people—fishermen, shepherds, farmers—become his associates. After a while they think so highly of him that they begin to feel that perhaps he is the Messiah, and they keep talking about it until eventually he himself yields to his disciples' demands and believes that he is the God-chosen one to establish the new kingdom. So with his followers he goes up to Jerusalem attempting to overthrow the old regime and establish in its stead the messianic kingdom,

with the natural result—within a few days he is arrested and put to death as a fanatic agitator and revolutionist, who foolishly thought to overthrow the government. His small group of followers were scattered, and his movement seemed doomed to extinction. And then came the report that some one had seen him again, followed by the establishment of the Nazarene sect, which under Paul developed into Christianity.

Of course you may say that this is practically the same as denying the historical existence of Jesus, because that part which I consider historical bears no relation whatever to the traditional conception of Jesus. This I frankly admit and surely insist that the fanciful figure which the ages have accepted as Jesus never did exist. That, indeed, is a purely mythological figure. And I refer not only to the ecclesiastical view of Jesus as God, or the conception that he occupies a unique place in the scheme of salvation which is the corner stone of Christianity. I refer also to the ethical estimate of mankind which assumes Jesus to have been a perfect pattern when the evidence furnishes abundant testimony to the contrary. There is no question in my mind that the Jesus of tradition, both ecclesiastical and ethical, is a purely imaginary being. Just as Buddha and Mohammed represent the essence of virtue to their respective followers, so also does the word Jesus stand for an epitome of the attributes each Christian aspires to in what he considers to be his best mood. In all these cases devout believers have done as they have always done with the conception of God. They conceive or accept a view of life which is the highest they can conceive, and then a concrete example of it is manufactured by the imagination as an object of inspiration and worship.

Here at the end I should like to say that I do not believe that the historicity of Jesus is nearly so important a problem as most people think. First, because whatever is worthy in the personality of Jesus is hard fixed in the minds of men and it makes little difference whether it was embodied in flesh and blood or in an ideal. Many of the most influential characters of the past have been mythological or fictitious, and when we contemplate them we seldom stop to think whether or not they ever had a flesh and blood existence. The thing that gives power to a personality is the

vividness with which it is portrayed and not the fact that such a person actually lived. The ideals that are summed up in the character of Prometheus are just as beautiful and just as potent as if Prometheus had been an historical character; and I could mention dozens of names of people who have been portrayed in fiction who are just as inspiring as if they had really lived. Their influence is no less powerful because they lived their true and only lives in the minds of men.

In the second place, I do not believe that an acceptance or denial of the historicity of Jesus has any vital effect upon the building of an ethical religion in the minds of modern men. Of course it is of tremendous importance to the scheme of Christian salvation, but to those who are emancipated from the tyranny of Christian theology, it really has little significance. As a speculative problem it is interesting, but as an ethical problem it is of small importance. Our task today is to build a religion which will so help men and women in their social and ethical adjustments that human life may be noble and beautiful. And for this, our eyes must be turned not "back to Jesus" but forward to the ideal humanity. Only as we free ourselves from the shackles of a dead past can we look forward to that day when

"A loftier race than e'er the world
Hath known shall rise
With flame of liberty in their souls,
And light of science in their eyes."

MEDITATION*
The Ideal of Jesus

We are to contemplate this morning the problem of Jesus' historical existence, and we are moved to think of the power of the ideal that accompanies his name. How tremendous his influence in the lives of men, and yet how infinitesimal the details of his existence. Millions, yes hundreds of millions, first around the Mediterranean, then throughout the continent of Europe, now over the whole Western world, have fallen under his strange potency.

For his sake men have loved and hated one another, massacred and helped one another, known the extremes of passion and of sacrifice. By him some have been raised to heights of ecstasy and others plunged to depths of despair. By him they have been mellowed, fortified, comforted, exalted, stirred in every way. He was the mirage towards which rushed the mad squadrons of the Crusaders. He was the mystic lover inviting docile processions of virgins to take the veil. In his name the Holy Inquisition tortured and killed; and in his name hospitals have soothed and healed.

Did he actually live on earth, or only in the minds of men? What manner of man was he—wise or foolish, humble or powerful? It matters not, he is the highest aspiration of human souls beneath the Western sky, an inward force that the centuries have been powerless to exhaust. There never was such a stupendous event as that which introduced the ideal of Jesus into the world.

*There have been many requests for the publication of the Sunday morning meditations in connection with the addresses. Usually there is not sufficient space. The present one is included because the address is not quite so long as usual.

It is the custom to publish Mr. Dietrich's addresses in a series of twelve numbers during the church year, from September to June. Many of these are out of print, but the titles listed below are still available and may be obtained by application in person or by mail to The Publication Committee, 803 LaSalle Ave., Minneapolis, at the price of 10 cents per copy.

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