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The Mythicist Theory of Jesus Christ: A Critical Analysis from a Christian Perspective

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Abstract: The mythicist theory of Jesus Christ constitutes one of the most controversial debates in contemporary historical, theological, and religious studies, as it fundamentally challenges both the historical legitimacy and the divine nature of this central figure of Christianity. According to this theory, Jesus Christ is interpreted not as a historical person, but rather as a mythological construct shaped by the religious and cultural myths of the ancient world. Examining this theory is of particular importance due to its profound implications for Christian theology, religious faith, and the historiography of Christianity. The **aim** of this article is to critically analyze the mythicist theory of Jesus Christ from a Christian theological perspective and to assess its compatibility with sacred texts, ecclesiastical tradition, and historical evidence. Employing an analytical-critical methodology and relying on library-based research, the study examines and compares the viewpoints of mythicist scholars, traditional Christian theologians, and liberal Christian thinkers. The findings indicate that although the mythicist theory raises significant questions regarding traditional interpretations of Christianity, it suffers from serious methodological and substantive deficiencies when evaluated in light of Christian theology and historical evidence. Consequently, this theory fails to convincingly negate the historical and divine status of Jesus Christ. Rather than serving as a viable alternative, the mythicist approach should be regarded as a critical challenge to classical Christian theology.

Keywords: Mythicist theory; Jesus Christ; Mythicization; Christian theology; Historicity of Jesus; Theological critique; Christianity.

INTRODUCTION

The theory of mythicization represents one of the most significant yet controversial approaches in contemporary religious, historical, and religious studies, seeking to explain the origin and nature of religious figures and narratives within the framework of myths and cultural symbols. This approach has played a decisive role in reinterpreting the history of religion and rethinking theological beliefs, particularly in the study of central religious figures. Within this context, Jesus Christ occupies a pivotal position, owing to his foundational role in Christian theology and his profound influence on the history of thought and Western culture, making him a focal point of ongoing scholarly debate.

From the eighteenth century onward, coinciding with the rise of historical-critical approaches to sacred texts during the Enlightenment, the mythicist theory of Jesus Christ entered academic discourse in a systematic manner. Some scholars have argued that narratives concerning Jesus' birth, miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection reflect mythological patterns prevalent in ancient religions and cultures, thereby calling into question the historical reliability of these accounts. Although such perspectives emerged within the broader framework of critical religious studies, they have had far-reaching implications for religious faith, Christian theology, and the understanding of the history of Christianity.

In contrast, a substantial body of Christian

theologians and historians has emphasized the historical existence of Jesus Christ, drawing upon the New Testament writings, ecclesiastical tradition, and the accounts of first-century Jewish and Roman historians to challenge the mythicist position on both methodological and substantive grounds. While acknowledging the presence of symbolic and theological dimensions within religious texts, these scholars insist on a clear distinction between theological symbolism and the wholesale denial of historical reality.

Despite the considerable volume of existing scholarship, a noticeable gap remains in the critical examination of the mythicist theory of Jesus Christ from within the Christian theological tradition itself—particularly studies that systematically evaluate mythicist claims in light of sacred scripture, church tradition, and historical evidence. The necessity of the present study arises from this gap, as a rigorous and balanced engagement with the mythicist theory can contribute to clarifying the boundary between legitimate historical criticism and the undermining of the theological foundations of Christianity.

Accordingly, the primary objective of this article is to analyze and critique the mythicist theory of Jesus Christ from a Christian theological perspective. The central research questions addressed are: On what epistemological and methodological foundations is the mythicist theory of Jesus Christ based? To what extent is this theory compatible with sacred texts, ecclesiastical tradition, and historical evidence? And what are the theological and interreligious implications of accepting or rejecting this theory? By focusing on these questions, the article seeks to present a balanced and analytical account of this complex issue and to provide a foundation for further research in Christological studies and comparative theology.

Literature Review

The question of Jesus’ historicity has been a subject of scholarly debate since the Enlightenment, when historical-critical methods were first systematically applied to sacred texts (Christ myth theory, n.d.). Early proponents of the mythicist approach argued that Gospel narratives could be better understood as expressions of mythological and cultural patterns rather than literal historical events, emphasizing parallels between Jesus traditions and ancient pagan motifs (Drews, 1926; Freke & Gandy, 1999). These scholars suggested that the stories about Jesus’ birth, miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection developed from pre-existing religious archetypes rather than factual history.

In the nineteenth century, David Friedrich Strauss and Bruno Bauer were pivotal figures in promoting a

critical examination of the Gospels. Strauss, in *Das Leben Jesu*, argued that many Gospel accounts reflected the religious imagination and messianic expectations of early Christian communities rather than historical reality (Drews, 1926). Bauer and the scholars of the *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* went further, questioning the very historical existence of Jesus and emphasizing the mythological dimensions of Christian narratives (Christ myth theory, n.d.).

During the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the mythicist theory evolved with scholars such as Arthur Drews, George Albert Wells, Richard Carrier, and Robert M. Price, who employed comparative mythology, textual criticism, and analyses of Pauline writings to argue that early Christian narratives primarily depict a divine-mythical figure later historicized in the Gospels (Carrier, 2014; Drews, 1926; Freke & Gandy, 1999). This literature often highlights the lack of independent contemporary evidence for Jesus’ life and the similarities between Gospel narratives and mythic motifs in ancient religions.

However, mainstream historical and theological scholarship has strongly critiqued these mythicist claims. Scholars including Albert Schweitzer, E. P. Sanders, N. T. Wright, Bart D. Ehrman, and James D. G. Dunn emphasize the historical existence of Jesus, drawing upon New Testament writings, early church tradition, and non-Christian sources such as Tacitus, Josephus, and Pliny the Younger (Ehrman, 2012). While acknowledging the symbolic and theological layers present in the Gospels, these scholars maintain that theological symbolism should not be conflated with a denial of historical reality.

Additionally, some contemporary scholars have adopted a mediating perspective, recognizing both the symbolic-theological elements of the Gospels and their historical foundations (Dundes, 1976). This approach, prevalent in modern and liberal theology, seeks to preserve the religious significance of the narratives without entirely rejecting the historical existence of Jesus. Despite the substantial body of literature, there remains a lack of systematic studies critically evaluating mythicist claims from within a Christian theological framework while rigorously engaging with historical, textual, and exegetical evidence. This gap underlines the necessity of the present study, which aims to provide a balanced, scholarly assessment of the mythicist theory in light of Christian theology and historical inquiry.

Conceptual Framework

The Study of the Term “Mythicization” in Linguistic and Scholarly Contexts The term mythicization has been examined across multiple disciplines, including linguistics, literature, philosophy, and the social sciences. It is a compound concept derived from

myth and -ization, referring to the process of attributing mythological characteristics to a subject, figure, or phenomenon.

Literal Meaning of the Term “Mythicization”

Literally, the word myth denotes fictional stories, legends, or narratives often closely intertwined with the cultural and religious beliefs of a society. The suffix -ization implies the act of imagining, assuming, or conceptualizing. Therefore, the compound term mythicization literally refers to the process of conceiving or representing a subject in a mythological manner (Dehkhoda, 1377/1998, Vol. 1, p. 325).

Technical/Scholarly Meaning of “Mythicization”

In scholarly and technical usage, mythicization denotes a process in which a phenomenon or figure is elevated beyond ordinary reality through particular characteristics and reaches a mythological status. This concept is widely applied in social sciences and philosophy to describe the creation of symbolic narratives that transcend literal reality (Ashouri, 1370/1991, Vol. 1, p. 98).

For instance, some historical or political figures are mythicized by society due to their prominent roles in history. This process can manifest through literature, art, or oral traditions.

Applications of Mythicization

The term mythicization refers to the transformation of a concept, figure, or event into a myth or treating it as a multi-faceted construct, emphasizing the central role of myths in human culture and thought. It illustrates the human capacity for imagination in constructing narratives that go beyond everyday reality, often influencing collective perceptions and behaviors.

The concept has been applied in various fields, including literature, philosophy, and social sciences, as outlined below:

1. Mythicization in Literature: In literary studies, mythicization is used as a tool for interpreting and analyzing texts. Authors often employ mythological elements to depict characters or events in ways that transcend ordinary reality, enabling readers to extract deeper and more symbolic meanings. For example, many classical and contemporary literary works portray heroes with attributes that approximate mythic figures, including extraordinary courage, supernatural connections, or unique destinies (Eliade, 1375/1996, Vol. 1, p. 141).

2. Mythicization in Philosophy: In philosophy, mythicization serves as a method for understanding worldviews and belief systems across cultures. Philosophers analyze myths to explore the cognitive and mental structures of humans throughout history. Notable examples include Nietzsche and Heidegger,

who utilized mythological frameworks to explain complex philosophical concepts (Eliade, 1375/1996, Vol. 1, p. 141).

3. Mythicization in Social Sciences: In the social sciences, mythicization plays a crucial role in analyzing the formation of symbols and collective narratives. Human societies frequently interpret historical or social events through mythological narratives, reflecting collective values, beliefs, and identity. Sociologists study these narratives to gain deeper insights into culture and social structure. For instance, many social and political movements employ myths and symbolic stories to foster cohesion and motivation among their members (Eliade, 1375/1996, Vol. 1, p. 141).

Perspectives of Muslim Scholars on the Mythicist Theory

Mythicization is a significant and debated topic in the fields of religious and philosophical studies, as it examines the role of myths in explaining human, religious, and cultural phenomena. Within this discourse, Muslim scholars, as part of the intellectual tradition of the Islamic world, have also addressed this topic and offered various perspectives.

Al-Farabi’s View: Abū Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi, one of the most prominent Islamic philosophers, discussed the role of myth in conveying religious truths. Farabi argued that myths serve as a medium for transmitting profound truths in a language accessible to the general public. He believed that mythological language could simplify complex philosophical concepts and make them understandable to broader audiences (Farabi, 1371/1992, p. 152).

Avicenna’s (Ibn Sina) View: Abū ‘Alī Ibn Sina also offered a distinctive perspective on the nature of myths. He posited that myths have two aspects:

a) The outward or apparent dimension, which is comprehensible to the general public.

b) The inward or esoteric dimension, which requires philosophical interpretation. Ibn Sina maintained that many religious concepts are conveyed through symbolic and mythological language to leave a deeper impact on the human intellect (Ibn Sina, 1957, Vol. 2, p. 345).

Al-Ghazali’s View: Imam Muhammad al-Ghazali, one of the greatest Islamic thinkers, held a relatively different stance on mythicization. He argued that certain religious stories, which might appear mythological, actually carry profound moral and spiritual meanings. Al-Ghazali emphasized that the primary purpose of these narratives is to guide humans toward truth, and they should not be

dismissed merely as fictional or symbolic tales (Al-Ghazali, 1383/2004, Vol. 1, p. 221).

Averroes’ (Ibn Rushd) View: Ibn Rushd, the renowned Andalusian philosopher, provided a philosophical analysis of myths. He asserted that mythological language serves as an educational tool for conveying deep philosophical and religious concepts. Additionally, Ibn Rushd cautioned that misinterpretation of myths could lead to misunderstandings (Ibn Rushd, 1370/1991, p. 187).

CONCLUSION

Despite differences in their perspectives, Muslim scholars consistently emphasize the significance of symbolic and mythological language in conveying religious and philosophical concepts. They caution against dismissing these narratives merely as fictional stories or legends. These viewpoints reflect the depth of philosophical and religious thought in the Islamic world and provide a rich foundation for further research in the study of mythicization within religious and intellectual contexts.

Perspectives of Christian Scholars on the Mythicist Theory

The mythicist theory represents a branch of interdisciplinary studies that examines the role and function of myths within cultures, societies, and literature. Myths are not merely simple narratives of the past; they reflect the intellectual and cultural structures of societies and provide a deeper understanding of human worldviews. Mythicization, in this context, refers to the analysis and interpretation of myths across historical, sociological, psychological, and literary frameworks.

Historically, myths have often served as tools for explaining natural, social, and even psychological phenomena. Presented through symbolic narratives, myths have helped humans relate to their environment, interpret challenges, and define cultural and social identities.

One of the early founders of mythicist theory is Joseph Campbell, who analyzed common structural patterns in myths across the world. Campbell argued that all myths follow a fundamental pattern or “hero’s journey,” which includes stages of departure, initiation, transformation, and return. This pattern reflects the psychological and spiritual development of human beings (Campbell, 1390/2011, Vol. 1, p. 23).

Additionally, Mircea Eliade, a prominent scholar in the history of religions, significantly contributed to the development of mythicist theory. In his work *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, Eliade emphasizes that myths function as instruments for reconstructing

sacred time and returning to the origins of the world. According to Eliade, myths enable humans to understand the meaning of their lives by reenacting sacred narratives (Eliade, 1385/2006, Vol. 2, p. 45). Carl Gustav Jung also played a crucial role in the development of mythicist theory through his concepts of the collective unconscious and archetypes. Jung argued that myths reflect the collective unconscious of humanity, and archetypes appear as universal patterns in both myths and dreams (Jung, 1377/1998, Vol. 3, p. 78).

Jesus Christ (‘Īsā, Peace Be Upon Him)

Jesus Christ is one of the greatest prophets, holding a special position across different religious traditions. In Christianity, he is recognized as the Son of God and the Savior of humanity. In Islam, he is revered as a major prophet, known as ‘Īsā ibn Maryam, and is mentioned repeatedly in the Quran. He is described as a prophet who performed great miracles, including healing the sick and raising the dead. The Quran emphasizes that Jesus was a messenger of monotheism, calling people to worship the one true God (Quran, Al-Imran 3:49).

According to the Christian Bible, Jesus was born in Bethlehem and spent his childhood in Nazareth. Around the age of thirty, he began his public ministry, teaching people about love, forgiveness, and justice. One of his central teachings was the love of God and compassion for fellow human beings (Holy Bible, Luke 2:4–7).

Various historical and religious sources have addressed different aspects of Jesus’ life. He has consistently been regarded as a symbol of peace, love, and self-sacrifice. His teachings continue to inspire millions around the world, and his message of love and forgiveness resonates deeply in the hearts of humanity.

Christianity

Christianity is one of the world’s major religions, founded on the teachings of Jesus Christ. It emerged in the first century CE in the region of Palestine and rapidly spread throughout the Roman Empire. The core teachings of Christianity emphasize love, forgiveness, and faith in God.

The Christian Bible comprises two main sections: the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament contains Jewish texts written before the advent of Christ, while the New Testament focuses on the life, teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Among its most significant parts are the Gospels, which narrate the life and teachings of Christ.

Christianity is divided into three major branches: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. The

Catholic Church, centered in the Vatican and led by the Pope, is the largest branch. The Orthodox Church is prevalent in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, while Protestantism, initiated by Martin Luther's Reformation in the sixteenth century, is primarily found in Northern Europe and the Americas (Walker, 1985, p. 23)

History of Christianity

Christianity began with the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. He was born in Bethlehem and spent most of his life in Nazareth. His teachings emphasized love, forgiveness, and faith in God. According to historical and religious sources, Jesus was crucified around 30 CE. His followers, who later became known as Christians, believed that he was resurrected after death and ascended into heaven. One of the most important sources on the life and teachings of Jesus is the Bible, which consists of the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament contains Jewish texts, while the New Testament includes the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and the Epistles of the Apostles. These texts serve as primary sources for the study of Christianity

Core Beliefs of Christianity

Christian beliefs are centered on faith in the one God, Jesus Christ as the Son of God and Savior of humanity, and the Holy Spirit. One of the central doctrines of Christianity is the concept of the Trinity, which posits that God manifests in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit (Saint Augustine, 1998, Vol. 1, p. 45)

Spread of Christianity

After the death of Jesus, his disciples assumed the responsibility of spreading his message. One of the most influential figures in this process was Paul the Apostle, whose missionary journeys played a crucial role in the expansion of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. Christianity gained further momentum with the conversion of Emperor Constantine in 313 CE and its declaration as the official religion of the Roman Empire in 380 CE, leading to rapid expansion (Latz, 2005, Vol. 2, p. 112)

Major Branches of Christianity

Christianity is divided into three main branches:

1. Catholicism: The largest Christian denomination, centered in the Vatican, with the Pope recognized as its spiritual leader.
2. Orthodoxy: Predominantly practiced in Eastern Europe and Russia, emphasizing the preservation of early Church traditions.
3. Protestantism: Emerged in the sixteenth century through Martin Luther's Reformation, emphasizing the authority of the Bible and individual faith (Will Durant, 1967, Vol. 4, p. 320).

Historical Background of the Mythicist Theory of Jesus Christ in Islam and Christianity

The Mythicist Theory of Jesus from an Islamic Perspective

The mythicist theory of Jesus is a significant topic in the fields of religious studies and comparative theology, as it examines the historical and spiritual status of Jesus Christ (‘Īsā, peace be upon him) across different religious traditions. This theory, particularly advanced by some Western scholars, asserts that the figure of Jesus may possess more mythical than historical characteristics. However, from an Islamic standpoint, this view is entirely rejected. The Qur’an explicitly affirms the real existence, divine mission, and spiritual rank of Jesus. This section aims to examine the Islamic perspective on the mythicist theory of Jesus and to cite relevant authoritative Islamic sources.

The Status of Jesus in the Qur’an

In Islam, Jesus (‘Īsā, peace be upon him) is recognized as one of the great prophets. The Qur’an portrays him as a chosen messenger sent to guide the Children of Israel. Verses in several chapters, including Al-Imran, Maryam, and Al-Ma'idah, emphasize his prophethood and spiritual rank. For instance, the Qur’an states:

"When the angels said, 'O Mary! Indeed, Allah gives you good tidings of a Word from Him, whose name will be the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary, distinguished in this world and the Hereafter and among those brought near [to Allah].'" (Al-Imran: 45) This verse clearly indicates that Jesus holds a high status with God and that his mission was both genuine and divine. Therefore, the mythicist theory, which reduces him to a purely human invention or a product of historical narratives, is incompatible with Islamic teachings

Refutation of the Mythicist Theory in Islam

Islam strongly emphasizes the historical reality of prophets, considering them real individuals entrusted with divine missions to guide humanity. The mythicist theory, which seeks to reduce religious figures to imaginary myths, is therefore rejected in Islamic thought. The Qur’an not only affirms the real existence of Jesus but also recounts his miraculous deeds, such as speaking from the cradle, healing the sick, and raising the dead by God's permission. The Qur’an declares:

"When Allah said, 'O Jesus, son of Mary! Remember My favor upon you and upon your mother when I supported you with the Holy Spirit so that you spoke to the people in the cradle and in maturity; and when I taught you the Scripture, wisdom, the Torah, and the Gospel; and when you shaped from clay a figure like a bird by My permission, and you breathed into

it, and it became a bird by My permission; and you healed the blind and the leper by My permission; and when you brought forth the dead by My permission; and when I restrained the Children of Israel from [harming] you when you came to them with clear proofs..." (Al-Ma'idah: 110)

These examples demonstrate that Jesus was a real historical figure whose mission was divinely ordained.

Conclusion (Islamic Perspective):

From an Islamic viewpoint, the mythicist theory regarding Jesus is entirely invalid. The Qur'an and authoritative Islamic sources explicitly affirm his real existence, divine mission, and miraculous acts. Thus, any attempt to portray Jesus merely as a product of human imagination or myth is incompatible with Islamic teachings and cannot undermine the elevated status of this great prophet.

The Mythicist Theory of Jesus from a Christian Perspective

The mythicist theory of Jesus is also a contentious issue in Christian history and religious studies. This perspective argues that Jesus Christ, rather than being a real historical figure, is primarily a myth or a constructed narrative. Since the eighteenth century, this theory has attracted the attention of scholars, theologians, and historians. In this study, the historical development of the mythicist theory from a Christian perspective is examined, alongside relevant sources and scholarly debates

Roots of the Mythicist Theory in the Modern Era

The mythicist theory of Jesus Christ has its roots in the European Enlightenment and has remained a controversial topic in historical and religious research. This theory posits that Jesus, rather than being a strictly historical figure, primarily embodies symbolic and mythological dimensions, and that many narratives associated with him derive from earlier myths and cultural beliefs. This section examines the origins and development of this theory in the modern era.

Skepticism during the Enlightenment

The eighteenth century European Enlightenment, with its emphasis on reason and critique of religious traditions, provided the intellectual climate for a critical re-examination of sacred texts. Many scholars of this period, including philosophers and historians, engaged in historical-critical analyses of religious scriptures. One of the earliest figures to question the historical existence of Jesus was Charles-François Dupuis. In his work *The Origin of All Religious Worship* (1795), Dupuis argued that stories about Jesus were derived from earlier solar myths, highlighting parallels such as virgin birth and resurrection motifs found in ancient civilizations

(Dupuis, 1795, p. 17).

Although Dupuis's perspective did not gain wide acceptance at the time, it paved the way for subsequent scholarly inquiry. He was among the first to introduce the concept of mythicization in relation to Jesus, drawing attention to the similarities between Gospel narratives and pre-Christian mythological traditions

The Nineteenth Century: David Friedrich Strauss

In the nineteenth century, David Friedrich Strauss, a prominent theologian and historian, advanced the discussion with his seminal work *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835). Strauss argued that, while Jesus may have existed as a historical figure, many narratives about him exhibit mythological characteristics. He analyzed these stories not as literal historical events but as symbolic and theological interpretations of Jesus' life (Strauss, 1835, p. 17).

Employing historical-critical methods, Strauss sought to differentiate between the mythological and historical dimensions of Gospel narratives. For instance, accounts of Jesus' miracles or virgin birth, according to Strauss, primarily reflect the religious beliefs of early Christian communities rather than actual historical occurrences. While Strauss's views met with strong opposition from church authorities, they profoundly influenced later scholarly research on the historicity of Jesus

The Twentieth Century: George Albert Wells and the Expansion of Mythicism

In the twentieth century, George Albert Wells further contributed to the critical analysis of New Testament texts. In works such as *The Jesus of the Illiterate and Jesus: Myth or History?* (1971), Wells argued that the figure of Jesus functions more as a literary construct than a historical individual. He suggested that many narratives about Jesus emerged to meet the religious needs of early Christian communities rather than to document actual historical events (Wells, 1971, p. 32).

Other prominent twentieth-century scholars, including Bruno Bauer and John M. Robertson, expanded the mythicist theory. Bauer asserted that stories about Jesus combined Jewish and Hellenistic legends and that no reliable historical evidence confirms his existence. By analyzing New Testament texts alongside mythological accounts from other cultures, Bauer sought to demonstrate that many elements in the Jesus narratives have non-Christian origins (Wells, 1971, p. 33)

Current Status of the Mythicist Theory of Jesus

The mythicist theory of Jesus remains a debated topic in the fields of history and theology. Although

it is generally regarded as a marginal perspective within the broader academic community, it continues to attract attention and analysis from certain scholars. Fundamentally, this theory posits that many narratives concerning the life and deeds of Jesus Christ possess predominantly mythological and symbolic elements rather than strictly historical ones. Many historians and theologians argue that there is sufficient historical evidence supporting the existence of Jesus as a historical figure. These evidences include non-Christian sources such as the works of Flavius Josephus, a first-century Jewish historian, and Tacitus, a Roman historian, both of whom make reference to a historical figure named Jesus. These independent accounts are particularly valuable as corroborative evidence for the historicity of Jesus outside of Christian religious texts.

Nonetheless, even scholars who affirm the historical existence of Jesus acknowledge that certain Gospel narratives may contain symbolic or theological dimensions. This perspective, which seeks to distinguish between the historical and mythic or theological elements of the Gospel accounts, has gained increasing acceptance among contemporary researchers. Such scholars argue that specific narratives, especially those describing miracles or supernatural events, may have been crafted primarily to convey theological and moral messages rather than to serve as precise historical reports.

On the other hand, proponents of the mythicist perspective assert that the stories concerning Jesus share notable similarities with myths and religious narratives from other cultures, suggesting potential influence or parallel development. They contend that many elements within the Gospels can be interpreted as reflections of the oral and mythological traditions prevalent during the period in which these texts were composed.

Ultimately, the mythicist theory of Jesus remains an open subject for scholarly inquiry. Divergent views and debates in this area reflect the inherent complexity and multi-layered nature of historical and theological studies. While existing historical evidence largely supports the existence of Jesus, symbolic and theological analyses continue to play a crucial role in enhancing our understanding of the narratives and religious messages associated with him.

In conclusion, a comprehensive evaluation of the current status of the mythicist theory requires careful attention to both the historical and symbolic dimensions of the Gospel accounts. Integrating these approaches allows for a richer and more nuanced understanding of Jesus' character and teachings. While some scholars emphasize the historical aspects, others focus on symbolic and theological

interpretations, and both approaches contribute significantly to the depth and sophistication of religious and historical studies.

Diverse Perspectives on Jesus Christ in Christianity
Christianity, as one of the world's major religions, has consistently been the subject of scholarly, historical, and philosophical inquiry. Among the central topics of discussion is the diverse understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. These perspectives can generally be categorized into three main approaches:

- a. The Traditional View
- b. The Liberal View
- c. The Critical View

Each of these perspectives is discussed in detail below.

a. The Traditional View: Jesus as a Historical and Divine Figure

The traditional Christian view holds that Jesus Christ was not only a historical and real figure but also possessed a divine nature. This perspective is rooted in the teachings of the Bible and emphasizes that Jesus is the Son of God who came to Earth to redeem humanity from sin.

Within this framework, Jesus is considered not merely a prophet or a great moral teacher but also a savior and an intermediary between God and humankind. Core doctrines of this view include the miraculous virgin birth of Jesus, his miracles, crucifixion, and resurrection. Multiple sources, including the New Testament and writings of early Christian authors such as Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, reinforce this belief. For instance, Augustine discusses the divine nature of Jesus extensively in his work *Confessions* (Augustine, 2011 [1390 SH]: 1/32).

b. The Liberal View: Integrating Historical and Mythical Elements

The liberal Christian perspective, which largely emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries, seeks to balance the historical and mythological aspects of Jesus' persona. Proponents of this view argue that Jesus was indeed a historical figure who lived in first-century Palestine, yet many narratives about him in the Bible may contain mythological or symbolic elements.

This perspective suggests that certain stories concerning Jesus' miracles or resurrection may serve as metaphors conveying ethical and spiritual messages. For example, Albert Schweitzer, in his seminal work *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, emphasizes the need to distinguish between the historical Jesus and the mythical Christ (Schweitzer, 1906: 2/115).

Furthermore, the liberal view underscores the

significance of Jesus’ social and historical context. Understanding his life and teachings, according to this perspective, requires careful consideration of the political, economic, and cultural circumstances of his time.

c. The Critical View: Denial of the Historical Existence of Jesus

The critical perspective, more common among secular and non-religious scholars, outrightly denies the historical existence of Jesus. Scholars in this camp argue that the narratives about Jesus are essentially myths created by early followers to reinforce their faith (Carrier, 2014: 1/78). According to this view, Jesus functions primarily as a literary and symbolic construct rather than as a verifiable historical individual

Critics of Jesus’ historicity often point to the lack of independent historical evidence regarding his life. They argue that most of the available information about him comes from religious sources, such as the Bible, which cannot be considered impartial historical evidence.

One of the most prominent critics in this field is Richard Carrier, who elaborates on his reasons for denying the historical existence of Jesus in his book *Jesus: Myth or History?* (Carrier, 2014: 1/78–79).

In conclusion, the diverse perspectives on the person of Jesus Christ reflect both the complexity of the subject and the variety of opinions among scholars and Christian adherents. The traditional view emphasizes the divine nature of Jesus, the liberal perspective seeks a balance between historical and mythological aspects, and the critical view questions his very historical existence

Implications of the Mythicist Theory

The mythicist theory, which questions the historical existence of Jesus Christ, is one of the most debated topics in religious studies and theology. By claiming that Jesus was not a historical figure but rather a mythological or symbolic character, this theory has far-reaching implications for Christian faith, theological and historiographical studies, and interreligious discourse. The following sections examine these implications in three main areas.

Impact on Christian Faith

Christian faith is deeply intertwined with the historical existence of Jesus Christ. For many believers, Jesus is not only a historical figure but also the incarnation of God on earth. The mythicist theory, which denies the historical reality of Jesus, can have profound effects on the faith of adherents. Many traditional Christians consider this theory a threat to their core beliefs. If Jesus were not a historical figure, fundamental doctrines such as the

resurrection and atonement would be called into question, potentially leading to a crisis of faith for some followers (Smith, 2015: 2/45). On the other hand, some more liberal Christians may view the theory as an opportunity to reinterpret their understanding of faith, focusing less on the historical existence of Jesus and more on the ethical and spiritual messages of his teachings.

Changes in Theological and Historiographical Studies

The mythicist theory has had significant effects on theological studies and religious historiography. In theology, it has encouraged scholars to examine sacred texts from historical-critical perspectives, applying rigorous methodologies to distinguish between myth, symbolism, and historical fact.

In religious historiography, mythicism has prompted researchers to seek additional historical evidence to confirm or challenge Jesus’ existence. This has led to the development of new research methods and the increased use of non-Christian sources, such as Jewish and Roman texts that reference Jesus, to assess their reliability as independent historical evidence. Scholars also increasingly examine the cultural and social functions of religious myths, exploring how sacred narratives may reflect societal needs and values, even when lacking historical foundations (Brown, 2010: 1/123).

Role in Interreligious Dialogue

The mythicist theory also has notable implications for interreligious dialogue. It can serve as a common ground for discussions across different faith traditions, as many religions contain symbolic or mythological figures whose historical existence is debated.

For example, in dialogue between Christianity and Islam, mythicism can provide a framework to explore similarities and differences in religious narratives. In Islam, Jesus (‘Īsā ibn Maryam) is recognized as a major prophet, but Muslim perspectives on his nature and role differ from Christian views. The mythicist approach can foster discussions about the role of religious figures in shaping faith identities (Robinson, 2018: 3/87).

Moreover, this theory can support secular approaches in religious studies. By focusing on the cultural and social dimensions of myths, scholars can emphasize shared human experiences rather than religious differences, promoting a more inclusive understanding of spiritual traditions.

Critics’ Perspective: Denial of the Historical Existence of Jesus Christ

Critics of the mythicist theory generally argue that

sufficient historical evidence exists to support the existence of Jesus Christ. They frequently cite historical sources, such as the writings of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus, both of whom refer to Jesus as a real historical figure (Harris, 2020: 4/2149).

Furthermore, critics contend that denying the historical existence of Jesus may undermine religious studies. They argue that overemphasis on the mythological aspects of Jesus' life can lead to the neglect of the historical and factual dimensions of the faith.

In contrast, proponents of the mythicist theory maintain that much of the existing historical evidence may have been influenced by religious biases and, therefore, cannot be considered fully reliable. They also argue that the primary purpose of religion should be the transmission of ethical and spiritual messages rather than the verification of the historical existence of its central figures (Harris, 2020: 4/2149).

The mythicist theory, which denies the historical existence of Jesus Christ, has had wide-ranging implications across various domains. This theory not only poses challenges to Christian faith but also has influenced theological studies and religious historiography significantly. Moreover, it provides a platform for interreligious dialogue, potentially fostering mutual understanding among different religious communities. Nevertheless, considerable debate persists regarding the validity and consequences of the mythicist perspective, highlighting the need for further scholarly research. Death and Resurrection as Key Elements in the Mythologization of Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is one of the most prominent figures in the history of world religions and myths. He is not only recognized as a divine messenger in Christianity but also holds a significant position across various cultures and religious traditions. One of the most important aspects associated with Jesus is his death and resurrection, which are regarded as key elements in the mythologization of his persona.

The Perpetuity of Jesus in Islam and Christianity

Jesus ('Isa, peace be upon him) is one of the most distinguished religious and historical figures, revered in both Islam and Christianity. In Christianity, he is presented as the Son of God and the Savior of humanity, whereas in Islam, he is acknowledged as one of the great prophets. The concept of the perpetuity of Jesus and his role in life after death has been a subject of enduring theological discussion and research. The following section examines these three elements and the perspectives associated with them:

A: The Death of Jesus: A Symbol of Sacrifice and

Redemption

The crucifixion of Jesus is one of the most pivotal events in Christian history, interpreted as a symbol of divine sacrifice and love for humanity. This event is detailed in the four Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and is considered a turning point in the history of human salvation.

Theologically, Jesus' death signifies the sacrificial atonement for human sins. This concept originates from early Christian teachings and gradually became a core pillar of Christian faith (see Romans 5:32). Historically, the crucifixion occurred due to the religious and political opposition of Jewish and Roman authorities to his teachings. Non-Christian historical sources, such as the writings of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, also reference this event (Josephus Flavius, 1385: 2/450).

B: The Resurrection of Jesus: Demonstration of Divine Power

The resurrection of Jesus three days after his death constitutes another central tenet of Christian faith. This event is regarded as proof of divine power and triumph over death and sin. According to the Gospels, Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, urging them to continue his mission.

Philosophers and theologians such as Saint Augustine and Thomas Aquinas have analyzed the resurrection as the pinnacle of human salvation, emphasizing that it signifies hope for eternal life and the triumph of the spirit over the body (Augustine, 1390: 1/234). From a mythological perspective, the resurrection of Jesus exhibits similarities with other mythological narratives in which heroes return to life after death. These parallels have led some scholars to suggest that the resurrection story may have been influenced by pre-existing mythologies.

C: Critics' Perspective: Denial of the Historical Existence of Jesus Christ

Despite the historical and religious evidence regarding Jesus' life, some critics deny his historical existence. This view, known as the "mythical school," argues that the narratives about Jesus are purely mythological creations of his followers.

Critics such as Bruno Bauer, a nineteenth-century German philosopher, contend that the figure of Jesus is a composite of various mythological and religious elements from Middle Eastern cultures. They argue that there is no independent evidence outside religious texts to confirm Jesus' historical existence (Bauer, 1382: 1/125).

The Death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ as Key Elements in His Mythologization

However, many contemporary scholars have rejected the view that Jesus is purely a mythical figure. They

refer to historical evidence, such as the writings of Josephus Flavius and the Roman historian Tacitus, which affirm the existence of Jesus (Harris, Thomas, 2020: 4/2149). Furthermore, the profound influence of Jesus’ teachings on human history also indicates his historical reality.

Conclusion: The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ have played a central role in his mythologization. These events not only form the foundational pillars of Christian faith but also have had extensive cultural, philosophical, and historical impacts. Despite critical perspectives questioning the historical existence of Jesus, existing evidence suggests that he was not only a historical figure but also a universal symbol of love, sacrifice, and hope.

The Perpetuity of Jesus in Islam

In Islam, Jesus (‘Isa, peace be upon him) is recognized as one of the Ulul-‘Azm prophets, holding a distinguished status with God. The Qur’an emphasizes that Jesus (‘Isa) was not merely an ordinary human but a divinely chosen messenger who performed numerous miracles. One of the most prominent aspects of Jesus in Islam is the belief in his ascension and the fact that he did not die.

The Qur’an states:

"And [for] their saying, 'Indeed, we have killed the Messiah, Jesus, the son of Mary, the messenger of Allah.' And they did not kill him, nor did they crucify him; but [another] was made to resemble him to them. And indeed, those who differ over it are in doubt about it. They have no knowledge of it except the following of assumption. And they did not kill him, for certain." (Surah An-Nisa, 4:157)

This verse clearly asserts that Jesus (‘Isa) was neither killed nor crucified but was raised to the heavens and will remain alive until the Day of Judgment. This emphasizes both the physical and spiritual perpetuity of Jesus (‘Isa) from the Islamic perspective.

The Perpetuity of Jesus in Christianity

In Christianity, the perpetuity of Jesus is understood in both physical and spiritual terms. According to Christian belief, Jesus (peace be upon him) rose from the dead on the third day following his crucifixion and ascended to heaven. This event, known as the Resurrection, constitutes one of the core tenets of Christian faith.

In the Gospel of Matthew, it is stated: "Jesus said to his disciples, 'I am alive, and you also will live.'" (Matthew 28:6)

This passage reflects the Christian belief in the spiritual perpetuity of Jesus. Additionally, Christians hold that Jesus will return at the end of times to judge the world.

The First Epistle to the Corinthians also emphasizes the centrality of the Resurrection: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile." (1 Corinthians 15:17)

These verses underscore the significance of the Resurrection and the enduring nature of Jesus in the Christian faith

Denial of the Historical Existence of Jesus Christ

Despite the prominent status of Jesus (‘Isa, peace be upon him) in both Islam and Christianity, some critics and historians have questioned his historical existence. These individuals argue that there is insufficient historical evidence to confirm Jesus (‘Isa) as a historical figure, and that the narratives surrounding him may be human inventions.

One of the most notable critics of this view was Bertrand Russell, the twentieth-century British philosopher. In his book *Why I Am Not a Christian*, Russell critically examined religious beliefs and argued that the stories concerning Jesus’ life and miracles are largely mythical rather than historical (Russell, Bertrand, 1935: 33).

However, many distinguished historians, such as Will Durant in *The Story of Civilization*, have emphasized that the historical existence of Jesus (‘Isa) is undeniable, even though some details of his life may have been interwoven with legends.

Conclusion: The perpetuity of Jesus (‘Isa) is a complex and significant issue in both Islam and Christianity, approached differently in each tradition. In Islam, the perpetuity of Jesus (‘Isa) is primarily understood in a physical sense, with the belief that he remains alive until the Day of Judgment. In contrast, Christianity interprets his perpetuity as both physical and spiritual, with the Resurrection serving as a cornerstone of Christian faith

Conclusion

The study of the mythicist theory of Jesus from the perspectives of Islam and Christianity provides an opportunity to examine the historical, theological, and cultural dimensions of this prominent prophetic figure in greater depth. This research demonstrates that the mythicist theory, through historical and symbolic analysis, seeks to explore various aspects of Jesus’ character within mythological and cultural frameworks. The key findings of this study can be summarized as follows:

Definition and Concept of Mythicization:

Mythicization refers to the attribution of mythological characteristics to a person or phenomenon. This concept is applied across various fields, including literature, philosophy, and social

sciences. Scholars from Islamic and Christian backgrounds have presented differing perspectives. From an Islamic viewpoint, myths serve as a means of conveying profound religious and philosophical concepts and should not be interpreted merely as fictional stories. Conversely, some Western thinkers have interpreted Jesus primarily as a mythological figure.

Islamic Perspective on the Mythicist Theory of Jesus: Islam explicitly rejects the mythicist theory regarding Jesus. The Qur'an affirms his real existence and divine mission, presenting him as a true prophet who performed numerous miracles. Islam also asserts that Jesus was neither killed nor crucified, but was raised to the heavens and will remain alive until the Day of Judgment. This perspective underscores Islam's emphasis on both the historical and spiritual reality of prophets.

Christian Perspective on the Mythicist Theory of Jesus:

Christianity encompasses diverse perspectives on Jesus, which can be broadly categorized into three main approaches:

- **Traditional View:** Emphasizes both the divine and historical aspects of Jesus.
- **Liberal View:** Seeks to balance the historical and mythological dimensions of his life.
- **Critical View:** Denies the historical existence of Jesus and interprets him primarily as a mythological figure.

Historical studies show that some Western scholars, such as David Friedrich Strauss, analyzed narratives about Jesus as symbolic and theological interpretations. Nevertheless, historical evidence, including writings by Josephus and Tacitus, supports the historical existence of Jesus.

Implications of the Mythicist Theory:

The mythicist theory has had significant effects on Christian faith, theological studies, and religious historiography. For traditional Christians, denying the historical existence of Jesus challenges fundamental beliefs. Conversely, some liberal Christians view the theory as an opportunity to reconsider the meaning of faith, focusing more on Jesus' ethical and spiritual messages. Additionally, the theory has prompted the development of new research methodologies in religious historiography and provided opportunities for interfaith dialogue.

Death and Resurrection of Jesus:

The death and resurrection of Jesus have played a central role in his mythologization. His crucifixion is interpreted as a symbol of sacrifice and divine love, while his resurrection represents divine power and triumph over death. These events form the foundation of Christian faith and have had extensive

cultural and philosophical influence.

In conclusion, the mythicist theory of Jesus, despite its controversies, provides a framework for examining the multifaceted nature of this significant prophetic figure. From the Islamic perspective, Jesus is a historical figure with a divine mission who performed numerous miracles. In contrast, certain Christian perspectives attempt to integrate the historical and symbolic aspects of his character. While the mythicist theory poses challenges to Christian faith, it has also contributed to the development of historical and theological studies. A more comprehensive understanding of Jesus requires further research into historical, cultural, and religious contexts to achieve a fuller and more nuanced comprehension of his life and teachings.

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