



## Research article

ISSN 2582-0214

**CHRISTOLOGY IN THE MYTHICAL CONTEXT OF HINDUISM: A  
CRITICAL EVALUATION OF BULTMANN'S DEMYTHOLOGIZATION**

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## ARTICLE INFO

**Article history:**

Received: 15-10-2024

Accepted: 14-11-2024

Available online 27-12-2024

**Keywords:***Christology,  
Demythologization,  
Hinduism, Bhagavadgita,  
Jesus of History,  
Pluralism, Kerygma*

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores three primary research objectives: first, to examine the mythical context of Hinduism; second, to critically analyze Rudolf Bultmann's concept of the demythologization of Jesus; and third, to assess non-biblical evidence supporting the historical reliability of Jesus Christ. Bultmann contends that the New Testament employs mythological language and argues for the removal or reinterpretation of these elements to reveal the core message, or Kerygma. Bultmann's approach to demythologizing, using form criticism, reflects his belief that faith in the Kerygma can exist without mythological frameworks. The historicity of Jesus has been questioned since the 17th century, with scholars like Richard Carrier promoting the "Christ-myth theory," which suggests that Jesus was a mythical figure akin to Hercules. This study challenges such views, supporting the historical authenticity of Jesus, as corroborated by biblical scholars. This article critically evaluates Bultmann's demythologized Christology in light of non-biblical evidence, particularly within the mythical framework of Hinduism, and argues for the convergence of the historical and faith-based Jesus as essential to Christian theology and practice.

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## Introduction

Rudolf Bultmann argues that the language of the New Testament is mythological and that these mythological elements should be eliminated. G. V. Jones notes that Bultmann grapples with whether the mythological conceptions from the Bible “should be abandoned, retained, or reinterpreted.”<sup>1</sup> Bultmann insists that theology must undertake the task of uncovering the **Kerygma**<sup>2</sup> from its mythological framework.<sup>3</sup> He advocates for faith in the **Kerygma**, but believes that it is presented within the framework of the “Christ-myth.”<sup>4</sup> According to Bultmann, “Demythologizing is a method of hermeneutics.”<sup>5</sup> However, he argues that mythology must be interpreted by using form criticism.

The historicity of Jesus has been challenged since the 17th century.<sup>6</sup> Disputes over the historicity of Jesus continue among Christian theologians and atheists alike. Despite this, the historicity of Jesus and the Gospels is well-established. Biblical scholars have extensively corroborated the historical reliability of Jesus as a historical figure. The facts surrounding Christ are undeniably historical, not fictional constructs. The Jesus of faith is the same as the Jesus of history.<sup>7</sup> Some, such as Richard Carrier, argue for the “Jesus-myth,” asserting that Jesus was a mythical figure rather than a historical person.<sup>8</sup> According to Carrier, Jesus may be as mythical as figures like Hercules or Oedipus, a theory commonly referred to as the “Christ-myth theory.”

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<sup>1</sup> Geraint Vaughan Jones, *Christology, and Myth in the New Testament*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> Kerygma is a Greek word used in the New Testament for “proclamation” or “preaching.” Kerygma is the core message of the gospel or the teaching of early church about Christ. In the context of Christianity, Kerygma means the apostolic proclamation of salvation through Jesus Christ. “Preaching by a herald sent by God.” William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, (tars.) *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1979), pp. 430-431.

<sup>3</sup> P. E. Hughes, *Scripture, and Myth: An Examination of Rudolf Bultmann’s Plea for Demythologization*, (London: The Tyndale Press, 1956), p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Miegge, *Gospel and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ, and Mythology*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> James K. Beilby and Paul Rhodes Eddy, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2009), p.11.

<sup>7</sup> See, Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict: Historical Evidence for the Christian Faith*, (Campus Crusade for Christ, 1977), pp. 83-89.

<sup>8</sup> See, Historian Richard Carrier in his 600-page monograph: *On the Historicity of Jesus*, writes that the story may have derived from earlier semi-divine beings from Near East myth, who were murdered by demons in the celestial realm. This would develop over time into the gospels.



There is growing criticism regarding the reliability of New Testament documents. Critics argue that the Gospel accounts of Jesus are fabricated. For example, Bultmann contends that much of the New Testament takes the form of mythology.<sup>9</sup> He further states, “We must understand that the New Testament writers used myths drawn from Gnosticism, Judaism, and other sources to express their existential experiences.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, the historicity of Jesus and the reliability of the Gospels are still challenged by biblical critics. The primary focus of this research is a critical evaluation of Bultmann's demythologized Christology in light of non-biblical evidence for the historicity of Jesus, particularly within the mythical context of Hinduism in India. This paper argues for the historical reliability of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith as central to Christian belief and practice, in contrast to Bultmann’s demythologized Christology.

## 1. Understanding the Mythical Context of Hinduism

The sacred texts of Hinduism, particularly Vedic literature, are replete with myths. For example, the epics of the **Mahabharata** and **Ramayana** are attributed to unhistorical characters in Hindu mythology. Hindu mythology features numerous mythological characters, such as deities, demons, gods, and goddesses, which are considered unhistorical. Each figure plays a significant role in these stories. However, none of the characters in Hindu mythology are fixed or unchanging; most have multiple roles and identities, making the interpretation of these epics complex and confusing.<sup>11</sup> When the Aryans migrated to northwest India, they brought with them a “mythic” tradition that became the foundation of early Hinduism.

Many religious figures from ancient religions are considered unhistorical or unknowable. For instance, the most ancient **Purana** in Hindu texts contain numerous mythical figures.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ, and Mythology*, (New York: Scribner, 1958), pp. 33-34.

<sup>10</sup> Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 33.

<sup>11</sup> Encyclopedia, “Hinduism and Mythology,” <https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/hinduism-and-mythology> (Accessed on 04/30/2023).

<sup>12</sup> “Purana” is a Hindu Text, composed primarily in Sanskrit with a wide range of topics, but also in regional languages, particularly filled with myths, legends, and other traditional lore. It was likely to be written between the 4<sup>th</sup> CE to 10<sup>th</sup> CE.



John Dowson affirms that, “The true meaning of Vedic myths is entirely lost, their origin is forgotten, and the significance and composition of many of the mythic names are unknown.”<sup>13</sup> This points to the fact that Hinduism is incredibly rich in its portrayal of mythical figures, many of which first appeared in ancient Hindu texts like the **Vedas**.

Mythical characters are central to Hinduism, and the mythology of Hinduism influences pluralism. Pluralism is the view that all religions lead to the same God and that all paths lead to salvation. According to John Hick, Christianity is not the only way to salvation but one of many. This concept aligns with the Hindu scripture **Bhagavad Gita**, where Krishna states, “By whatever way men worship me, even so, do I accept them; for, in all ways, O Partha, men walk in my path.”<sup>14</sup> In the context of pluralism, each religion asserts its truth claims based on its beliefs. However, truth cannot be subjective; it must be objective. For example, Christ is not Krishna, and Krishna is not Christ; they are distinct figures. Christianity, therefore, makes objective claims about Christ, and the historical existence of Jesus is corroborated by historical evidence. This can be compared to an analogy: if one person claims, “There is milk in the freezer,” while another asserts, “There is no milk in the freezer,” both statements cannot be true simultaneously; only one can be true. Similarly, not all religions can be true in an objective sense, though they may promote ethical values.

## 2. Bultmann’s Definition of Demythologization

There are various kinds of mythology. For Bultmann, the concept of myth has multiple dimensions. He defines myth as “The use of imagery to express the otherworldly in terms of this world, and the divine in terms of human life; the other side in terms of this side.”<sup>15</sup> In the Asian context, however, mythology is understood as unhistorical, referring to characters without historical significance. Bultmann’s view of mythology is multifaceted.

### 2.1. Myth as Imagery

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<sup>13</sup> John Dowson, *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion* (New Delhi: Rupa and Cooperatives, 2000), p. 13.

<sup>14</sup> *Bhagavadgita*, IV: II.

<sup>15</sup> Geraint Vaughan Jones, *Christology, and Myth in the New Testament* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1956), p. 8.



Bultmann saw myth as a form of symbolic language, using images and stories to convey deeper truths about human existence, God, and the world. For instance, biblical stories of miracles or the supernatural are not meant to be taken literally but are symbols pointing to fundamental existential realities. Mythology, in this sense, represents the divine in worldly terms, such as expressing God's transcendence in spatial terms. For example, the transcendence of God is expressed in terms of distance in space. When this kind of imagery is used, worship is readily understood as an action in which, by the use of material means, non-material powers are communicated to human beings.<sup>16</sup>

## **2.2. Myth as Cosmology**

Bultmann argues that the biblical view of God's creation of the cosmos is mythological. He claims that, "Everything in the worldview of antiquity is mythological."<sup>17</sup> Miegge observes that Bultmann would, in one breath, mention angels and demons, the Holy Spirit and the incarnation, all as part of "That unique understanding of the world which is now unacceptable to the modern mind."<sup>18</sup> According to Bultmann, the New Testament narratives concerning the creation of the world are mythical. He believed that cosmological ideas common in ancient times are no longer credible or relevant in the modern scientific age. For example, concepts such as a physical heaven above the clouds or a literal hell beneath the earth are mythical constructions that modern people find untenable in light of scientific and technological advancements.

## **2.3. Myth as the Representation of the Divine in Human Terms**

Bultmann considers myth to be a way of representing divine action in human terms. He argues that myth is "That form of representation in which what is not of this world is outlined in terms of this world, in which the divine is outlined in terms of the human."<sup>19</sup> Bultmann did not regard myth as a literal account of historical events but rather as symbolic representations

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<sup>16</sup>Miegge, *Gospel, and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, p. 91.

<sup>17</sup> Miegge, *Gospel, and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, p. 93.

<sup>18</sup> Miegge, *Gospel, and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, p. 93.

<sup>19</sup> Miegge, *Gospel, and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, p. 98.



of deeper truths about the human condition and the divine. For him, myth was the language ancient peoples used to express the mystery of God's action in the world and the meaning of human existence in relation to God. He believes that myths conveyed existential truths, but they were not intended to be understood as factual descriptions.

#### 2.4. Myth as Religious Symbolism

In Bultmann's view, myth is an integral part of religious belief. He contends that, "The Jesus of history is entirely hidden behind the Christ of myth."<sup>20</sup> According to Bultmann, the concept of the Messiah was a creation of Palestinian Jews, a mythical figure later mistakenly identified by the Palestinian Christian community.<sup>21</sup> David Bidney supports this interpretation, stating that myths are interpreted "symbolically" for their ideal meaning. In religion, mythical language is used to symbolize a non-mythical reality. Bidney argues that myth is "indispensable" to religion because it is impossible to fully separate the language of myth from that of religion."<sup>22</sup>

#### 3. Bultmann's Demythologization of Jesus

The theory that posits Jesus was a mythical figure is commonly referred to as the "Jesus-myth theory," "Jesus mythicism," or the "Jesus ahistoricity theory."<sup>23</sup> The Christ-myth theory is best defined as "the view that the person known as Jesus of Nazareth had no historical existence."<sup>24</sup> Some proponents argue that the name "Jesus" was not his actual name. For instance, Atwill asserts that Jesus' real name was "Rabbi Yeshua Ben Yosef,"<sup>25</sup> a teacher

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<sup>20</sup> Miegge, *Gospel, and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, p. 20.

<sup>21</sup> Miegge, *Gospel, and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> David Bidney, *Myth, Symbolism, and Truth*, <https://publish.iupress.indiana.edu/read/untitled-8dbaec56-6af5-4838-8c30-53900c371a13/section/a60e013e-efae-4627-ac49-6b48d4665915> (Accessed on 04/18/2023).

<sup>23</sup> This theory was first formulated by Bart Denton Ehrman, an American New Testament scholar (1955).

<sup>24</sup> Gullotta, Daniel N. (2017). "On Richard Carrier's Doubts: A Response to Richard Carrier's On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt." *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus*. 15 (2–3): 310–346.

<sup>25</sup> Philip Perry, <https://bigthink.com/philip-perry/a-growing-number-of-scholars-are-questioning-the-existence-of-jesus> (Accessed on 24th October 2018).



who gathered followers around his teachings in the first century. Critics like Ben Goren and Bart Denton Ehrman also present Jesus as a mythical figure.<sup>26</sup>

According to Rudolf Bultmann, the New Testament contains many mythological conceptions, such as the person of Christ and the preaching of the kingdom of God. Bultmann argues that Jesus was mythologized “from the very beginning of earliest Christianity.” He further suggests that “Jesus understood himself in the light of mythology”<sup>27</sup> and never claimed himself to be the Messiah and the Son of Man.<sup>28</sup> Bultmann contends that both Jesus’ teachings about the kingdom of God and the portrayal of his person are mythological. He argues:

At any rate, the early Christian community thus regarded him as a mythological figure. It expected him to return as the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven to bring salvation and damnation as judge of the world. His person is viewed in the light of mythology when he is said to have been begotten of the Holy Spirit and born of a virgin, and this becomes clearer still in Hellenistic Christian communities where he is understood to be the Son of God in a metaphysical sense, a great, pre-existent heavenly being who became man for the sake of our redemption and took on himself suffering, even the suffering of the cross. Such conceptions are mythological, for they were widespread in the mythologies of Jews and Gentiles and were transferred to the historical person of Jesus.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Ben Goren, <https://whyevolutionistrue.wordpress.com/2014/09/05/guest-post-on-the-historicity-of-jesus/> (Accessed 25<sup>th</sup> March 2023).

<sup>27</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ, and Mythology*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), p.16. Since 1941, Bultmann’s essay on “demythologizing” the New Testament has brought a great challenge to the biblical scholars of the New Testament. Bultmann denies the apostolic origin and the tradition of the New Testament. Giovanni Miegge, *Gospel and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, Translated by Bishop Stephen Neill (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 14. As a philosopher, Bultmann could probably put more reason above the revelation of God; therefore, he could not grasp what pertains to the truth of the metaphysical world. See, Giovanni Miegge, *Gospel and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, Translated by Bishop Stephen Neill (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), p. 92.

<sup>28</sup> Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, p. 16.

<sup>29</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Mythology*, 16. See Giovanni Miegge, *Gospel and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, Translated by Bishop Stephen Neill (Virginia: John Knox Press, 1960), pp.5-7. Bultmann argues that “the task of theology will be to eliminate the mythological elements from the preaching of the Christian faith.” (Miegge, *Gospel and Myth*, p. 7). According to Bultmann, the creation account, the redemption narratives, the death and resurrection of Jesus, and the final judgment for the dead are all mythological. The





Bultmann thus argues that the New Testament authors and the early Christian community mythologized Jesus. He claims that Jesus, who lived in Palestine, was a simple, humble, and sacrificial human being who lived, suffered, and died on the cross like any other person. Bultmann seeks to uncover deeper meaning within the mythological preaching and teachings of Jesus as well as the mythological conceptions found in the New Testament. This process of interpreting the New Testament is what he calls “demythologization.”

For Bultmann, the “Christ of faith” and the “Jesus of history” are not identical.<sup>30</sup> He states:

It is in this sense that we can say that in Him God encounters us. The formula ‘Christ is God’ is false... divine goodwill, which has been perfectly manifested in him (Jesus), was made possible for the earliest Christian community by its direct relationship to the actual man who had lived as Jesus of Nazareth. For Christians of successive generations, the act of God takes to itself reality in the preaching of the Church, in which Christ lives again as interpreted by faith.<sup>31</sup>

Bultmann rejects the Gospels as sources of historical knowledge about Christ. Consequently, he argues that the historical Jesus cannot be traced through the mythological character of the Gospels. While the historical Jesus is rooted in the Gospel narratives, Bultmann believes the mythological hermeneutic prevents a clear depiction of the historical Jesus. The Kerygma (proclamation) teaches about the Jesus of faith as both divine and human—God incarnated in the flesh, who lived among humans, suffered, died, and was resurrected. However, Bultmann's mythological interpretation challenges this understanding. He argues that the messianic concept of Jesus is mythological, having been attributed to him by the Hellenistic community, and that Jesus himself never claimed to be the Messiah, which he attributes to “the work of the Palestinian community.”<sup>32</sup>

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church produces a mythical cosmology. Redemptive narratives in the New Testament are said to be of the Gnostic myth of redemption. Bultmann believes that the New Testament is written in the language of mythology.

<sup>30</sup> Miegge, *Gospel, and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Miegge, *Gospel, and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>32</sup> Miegge, *Gospel, and Myth in the Thought of Rudolf Bultmann*, p. 25.





In *Scripture and Myth: An Examination of Rudolf Bultmann's Plea for Demythologization*, P. E. Hughes critiques Bultmann's approach, quoting Philippians 3:20 and stating that: "The catharsis of demythologization alters all that, leaving us with only a man, Jesus of Nazareth, who like all other men born into this world, lived and struggled and died: and that, as far as the past and the future are concerned, is all there is to it."<sup>33</sup> Bultmann's demythologization, according to Hughes, eliminates the possibility of Jesus possessing divine prerogatives, which undermines the salvific meaning of Christian teachings. Vaughan Jones, in *Christology and Myth in the New Testament*, adds that, "It may be said that the New Testament contains 'mythological thinking,' though its subject is not myth but historical, whereas mythology, or myth, does not deal with recognizable historical material."<sup>34</sup>

#### **4. Non-Biblical Evidence for the Historicity of Jesus Christ**

This session explores the non-biblical evidence supporting the historical reliability of Jesus Christ. To establish Jesus' historicity, non-biblical or non-Christian sources are examined, including Greco-Roman accounts from Cornelius Tacitus (c. 52–55 – 118 C.E.), Suetonius (c. 69 – 122 A.D.), Pliny the Younger (Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, 61–113 A.D.), Phlegon of Tralles (a first-century historian), Mara Bar-Serapion (c. 50 A.D.),<sup>35</sup> as well as Jewish and Samaritan sources such as Titus Flavius Josephus (37–100 A.D.) and Thallus (52 A.D.).

##### **4.1. Publius Cornelius Tacitus (52-55c – 118C.E)**

Tacitus, considered one of Rome's greatest historians, served as governor of Asia and was the son-in-law of Julius Agricola, the Governor of Britain between 80 and 84 A.D.<sup>36</sup> In his final major work, *Annals* (c. 116–117 C.E.), Tacitus wrote a biography of Emperor Nero, which includes a mention of Christians and Christ in connection with the great fire of Rome in 64 C.E.

<sup>33</sup> Hughes, *Scripture, and Myth: An Examination of Rudolf Bultmann's Plea for Demythologization*, p. 14.

<sup>34</sup> Jones, *Christology, and Myth in the New Testament*, p. 7.

<sup>35</sup> See, Richard Carrier, [https://infidels.org/library/modern/richard\\_carrier/thallus.html](https://infidels.org/library/modern/richard_carrier/thallus.html), (Accessed on (Accessed on 27th March 2023)).

<sup>36</sup> Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1979), 81.



Therefore, to put down the rumor, Nero substituted culprits and punished in the most unusual ways those hated for their shameful acts that the crowd called “Christians.” The founder of this name, Christ (*Chrestus* in Latin), had been executed in the reign of Tiberius by the procurator Pontius Pilate...suppressed for a time, the deadly superstition erupted again not only in Judea, the origin of this evil but also in the city (Rome), where all things horrible and shameful from everywhere come together and become popular.<sup>37</sup>

Tacitus’ reference to “Christus” (Christ) presents four clear historical facts: (1) Christus refers to Jesus; (2) Jesus was the founder of the Christian movement; (3) He was executed by the Roman governor of Judea; (4) His death occurred during the reign of Pontius Pilate under Emperor Tiberius. Lawrence Mykytuk emphasizes these points, arguing that Tacitus, known for his historical rigor, is unlikely to have recorded false or careless details. Just as his account of Nero and the fire of Rome is accepted as factual, Tacitus’ statements regarding Jesus must also be considered historically reliable, further validating the objectivity of the evidence for Christ.<sup>38</sup>

Tacitus was certainly the best of all Rome’s historians, as a historian, he never gave himself to careless writing. For example, Tacitus points out Nero’s involvement during a fire in Rome, and that Nero tried to blame Christians for this fire, all these are historical facts; therefore, Tacitus’ statement about Jesus must also be true and historical.

#### **4.2. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (69c-122A.D)**

Another Roman historian, Suetonius, is best known for his work *De Vita Caesarum* (The Lives of the Caesars), a collective biography of Rome's early emperors. Suetonius makes two

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<sup>37</sup>Annals XV.44, as translated in Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside*, pp.42-43. Instead of better-documented reading, “Christians” appears in a more traditional translation by Alfred J. Church and William J. Brodribb, *Annals of Tacitus* (London: Macmillan, 1882), pp. 304-305.

<sup>38</sup> This source is cited from Lawrence Mykytuk’s feature article “Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible,” from January/February 2015. Many New Testament scholars date Jesus’ death to c. 29 C.E; Pilate governed Judea in 26-36 C.E., while Tiberius was then Emperor in 14-37 C.E. Therefore, Tacitus brief reference corroborates historical details of Jesus’ death from the New Testament.



notable references to Jesus. In *The Life of Claudius* (25:4), he writes, “As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus (another spelling of Christus), he (Claudius) expelled them from Rome.”<sup>39</sup> Additionally, in *The Lives of the Caesars* (26:4), Suetonius mentions, “Punishment by Nero was inflicted on the Christians, a class of men given to a new and mischievous superstition.”<sup>40</sup> The term “mischievous superstition” refers to what Suetonius perceived as dangerous or unconventional beliefs, possibly akin to what would now be called “black magic.”

The Latin version of Suetonius’ statement about Christ reads, *Iudaeos impulsore Christo assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit* (early version), later revised to *Iudaeos impulsore Chresto assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit*.<sup>41</sup> However, Christians prefer the early version of the Latin occurrence. Suetonius’ references to Jesus and Christians, either an early version or a later version, it has already been accepted by Christians and non-Christians as valid evidence for the historicity of Jesus Christ.

#### 4.3. Pliny the Younger (61-113A.D)

Pliny the Younger, also known as Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, was a lawyer, author, and magistrate of ancient Rome. Bennett affirms that, “Pliny served as an imperial magistrate under Trajan (98–117).”<sup>42</sup> A close friend of historian Tacitus, Pliny wrote a letter to Emperor Trajan around 112 A.D., seeking advice on how to handle the growing Christian community.<sup>43</sup> Trajan's reply indicates that merely being a Christian was enough to warrant punishment. Pliny records that numerous Christians, including women and children, were

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<sup>39</sup> *The Life of Claudius*: 25:4. Stated in McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, p. 83. McDowell’s expression of “another spelling for *Christus*” is highly under debate; it is not another spelling, but it is identified as “another word for *Christus*.” For instance, *Chrestus* is a Latin name whereas *Christus* is a Greek name for Jesus!

<sup>40</sup> McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* p. 83. However, there are Bible critics who oppose the use of the early version of the Latin notation of “*Iudaeos impulsore Christo* (Greek, “Christus”) *assidue tumultuantis Roma expulit*.” For instance, See, D.M. Murdock, “Is Suetonius’s Chresto a Reference to Jesus?”

<sup>41</sup> See, D.M. Murdock, “Is Suetonius's Chresto a Reference to Jesus?”

<sup>42</sup> Julian Bennett, *Trajan: Optimus Princeps: A Life and Times*, (New York & London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 113–125.

<sup>43</sup> Philip Carrington, *The Early Christian Church* Volume 1:429, Cambridge Univ Press.



executed. As McDowell notes, “Pliny forced Christians to worship the emperor’s statue and to curse Christ, something a devout Christian could not be induced to do.”<sup>44</sup>

In the same letter, Pliny describes how Christians conducted themselves:

They affirmed that the whole of their guilt, or error, was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before dawn, singing a hymn to Christ as to a god, and binding themselves by oath not to engage in any wicked deeds, but to abstain from fraud, theft, adultery, falsifying their word, or refusing to return a trust when called upon to do so.<sup>45</sup>

As Pliny had no prior experience with legal proceedings involving Christians, he sought clarification from Trajan to ensure his actions were justifiable. These letters, along with Trajan’s responses, are the earliest surviving Roman documents mentioning Christians, further substantiating the historical reliability of Jesus Christ.

#### 4.4. Phlegon of Tralles (80 A.D)

Phlegon was a first-century Greek chronicler and historian of the Roman Empire.<sup>46</sup> A renowned historical document regarding an “eclipse” that occurred during the first century is attributed to Phlegon. Two works are credited to him: *Chronicles* and *Olympiads*. His principal work was the *Olympiads*,<sup>47</sup> a historical compendium in sixteen books, covering the 1st to the 229th Olympiad (776 BC to AD 137), portions of which are preserved in the works of Eusebius, Photius, and George Syncellus.<sup>48</sup> Although his *Chronicles* have been lost, a fragment of that work supports the account of “darkness upon the earth” during the

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<sup>44</sup> McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* pp. 82-83. In his letter (*Epistulae* X.96) Pliny detailed an account of how he conducted trials of suspected Christians who appeared before him as a result of anonymous accusations and asked for the emperor’s guidance on how they should be treated.

<sup>45</sup> McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* pp. 82-83. (Pliny, *Epistulae*, X.96).

<sup>46</sup> He was born in the later first century 80 A.D and is also known as a second-century Greek historian. <https://streetapologist.wordpress.com/2013/09/29/thallus-phlegon-on-christ/> (Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> April, 2023)

<sup>47</sup> Chronicle (De. Opif. Mund. II:21), The 4<sup>th</sup> year of the 202<sup>nd</sup> Olympiad was 32-33AD. In the fourth year, however, of Olympiad 202, an eclipse of the sun happened, more excellent than any that had happened before it; at the sixth hour, the day turned into the night, so that the stars were seen in the sky, and an earthquake in Bithynia toppled many buildings of the city of Nicaea. These things [are according to] Jerome.

<sup>48</sup> Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phlegon\\_of\\_Tralles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Phlegon_of_Tralles) (Accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2023).



crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The second-century historian Julius Africanus also cites Phlegon's work, confirming the occurrence of this darkness during the time of Jesus' crucifixion.

McDowell writes:

After his (Africanus') remarks about Thallus' unreasonable explanation for the darkness, he quotes Phlegon, who stated that "during the time of Tiberius Caesar, an eclipse of the sun occurred during the full moon." Phlegon is also referenced by Origen in *Contra Celsum*, and Philopon notes: "And about this darkness... Phlegon recalls it in the *Olympiads* (the title of his history)." He asserts that "Phlegon mentioned the eclipse which took place during the crucifixion of the Lord Christ, and no other eclipse; it is clear that he did not know from his sources of any similar eclipse in prior times... and this is evidenced by the historical account of Tiberius Caesar."<sup>49</sup>

Phlegon of Tralles is considered a credible historical source concerning the reliability of non-Christian accounts of Jesus Christ. Christian apologists have referred to Phlegon for over a millennium as corroboration of the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. His testimony supports the authenticity and veracity of the historical integrity of Jesus Christ.

#### **4.5. Mara Bar-Serapion (50A.D)**

Another significant reference for Christian apologists regarding the historical reliability of Jesus Christ is the letter of Mara Bar-Serapion, a Syrian. According to F.F. Bruce, this letter—preserved in the British Museum and written sometime after 73 A.D—was addressed by Mara Bar-Serapion to his son, Serapion, while in prison.<sup>50</sup> In this letter, Mara compares the deaths of Socrates, Pythagoras, and Jesus Christ, as Bruce summarizes:

What advantage did the Athenians gain from putting Socrates to death? Famine and plague came upon them as judgment for their crime. What advantage did the men of

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<sup>49</sup> McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* p. 84. Also see, Origen of Alexandria (182-254 AD), in *Against Celsum* (Book II, Chap. XIV), wrote that Phlegon, in his "Chronicles", mentions Jesus.

<sup>50</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?* (Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2011), p. 14.



Samos gain from burning Pythagoras? In an instant, their land was covered with sand. What advantage did the Jews gain from executing their King? Shortly after, their kingdom was abolished. God justly avenged these three wise men: the Athenians died of hunger, the Samians were overwhelmed by the sea, and the Jews, ruined and expelled from their land, live in complete dispersion. But Socrates did not die for good; he lives on in the teaching of Plato. Pythagoras did not die for good; he lives on in the statue of Hera. Nor did the wise King die for good; He lives on in the teaching He gave.<sup>51</sup>

In this letter, Mara Bar-Serapion's mention of Pythagoras, the famous Greek mathematician and philosopher, and Socrates, the classical Greek philosopher regarded as a founder of Western philosophy, supports their historical authenticity. If Pythagoras and Socrates are accepted as historical figures, then Jesus, the “wise King” mentioned in Serapion’s letter, is likewise to be considered an indisputable historical figure.

#### 4.6. Thallus (52A.D)

Thallus, a Samaritan-born historian, was one of the earliest Gentile writers to mention Christ, doing so around 52 A.D. McDowell notes, “However, his writings have disappeared, and we only know of them from fragments cited by other writers. One such writer is Julius Africanus, a Christian author from around 221 A.D.”<sup>52</sup> Julius Africanus writes, “Thallus, in the third book of his histories (Chronography, 18:1), explains away this darkness as an eclipse of the sun—unreasonably, as it seems to me. This is unreasonably so, of course, because a solar eclipse could not take place at the time of the full moon, and it was during the Paschal full moon when Christ died.”<sup>53</sup>

Julius Africanus refutes Thallus’ naturalistic explanation for the darkness surrounding the death of Jesus. Thallus attempted to account for the darkness that fell over Judea at the time of the crucifixion by attributing it to a solar eclipse. However, Africanus argues that this

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<sup>51</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, 14.

<sup>52</sup> McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* p. 84.

<sup>53</sup> McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* p. 84. McDowell further asserts, “Thus, from this reference, we see that the Gospel account of the darkness which fell upon the land during Christ's crucifixion was well known and required a naturalistic explanation from those non-believers who witnessed it. 2/113.”



explanation is flawed, as a solar eclipse would be impossible during a full moon, aligning with the time of Christ's death. This dispute underscores Africanus' belief in the supernatural nature of the event, as recorded in the Gospels. The mention of Jesus in this context affirms the historicity of the crucifixion.

#### 4.7. Titus Flavius Josephus (37-100A.D)

Josephus,<sup>54</sup> a Jewish historian who became a Pharisee at the age of 19, is another key figure in documenting the existence of Jesus. Norman Geisler affirms that Josephus was a contemporary of Christ, stating, "Jewish historian Josephus, a contemporary of Christ, abounds with references to figures familiar to New Testament readers."<sup>55</sup> Josephus, as a professional historian of Palestine, recorded a wealth of information about Biblical characters and events in the region. His works mention figures such as Herod, Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, and the procurators of Judea, as well as high priestly families like Annas, Caiaphas, and Ananias. In every extant manuscript of Josephus' work, he mentions Jesus of Nazareth in *Antiquities* XX 9:1. As Malone notes, "The official Latin name for Josephus' passage on Jesus is the *Testimonium Flavianum* (sometimes abbreviated as 'TF')."<sup>56</sup> In *Antiquities*, Josephus writes:

At this time there was a wise man who was called Jesus. His conduct was good, and he was known to be virtuous. Many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. But those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive. Accordingly, he was perhaps the Messiah concerning whom the prophets had recounted wonders.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Some sources say Josephus' original name was, Joseph Ben Matthias, see, Gary William Poole on Flavius Josephus.

<sup>55</sup> Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Michigan: Baker Book House, 1996), p. 323.

<sup>56</sup> Vocab Malone, "Josephus and Jesus," <https://streetapologist.wordpress.com/2013/09/08/josephus-jesus-from-a-series-on-early-non-biblical-references-to-jesus/>, in a Series of Non-Biblical references to Jesus: Host of Urban Theologian Radio (Accessed on 09<sup>th</sup> April 2023).

<sup>57</sup> *Antiquities* 18:3 (The newly discovered Arabic version was shorter than our other manuscripts containing the *TF* and did not contain the obvious interpolations. It was released to the general public by Professor Schlomo Pines of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem in 1971). See, Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 323. Also,





Geisler observes that Josephus also wrote about James, the brother of Jesus, stating, “the brother of Jesus, the so-called Christ, whose name was James.”<sup>58</sup> Geisler’s rendering of this passage has been subjected to criticism; a more accurate translation might be “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ.”<sup>59</sup> Flavius Josephus, a Jewish priest, scholar, and historian, produced his monumental work *Antiquities of the Jews* around 93–94 A.D., which includes two references to Jesus Christ in Books 18 and 20. In *Antiquities XVIII*, 3:3, Josephus describes Jesus as a wise teacher and states that he was crucified by Pilate. Modern scholarship largely acknowledges the authenticity and reliability of Josephus’ *Antiquities*, and the references to Jesus Christ are considered credible historical records.

Jesus Christ is not merely a symbolic or mythical figure but a unique historical individual who lived, suffered, died, and was resurrected at a specific time and place. This historicity is corroborated by historical and archaeological research. In contrast, many deities in Hinduism are mythological figures whose origins are obscured or unknown. Unlike such mythic figures, the historicity of Jesus Christ has been extensively verified and firmly established.

## Conclusion

This study has critically examined the demythologization of Jesus as proposed by Rudolf Bultmann. Bultmann’s approach, which seeks to remove mythological elements from the New Testament to reveal the core message of the Kerygma, presents a significant hermeneutical challenge. While Bultmann’s method, grounded in form criticism, attempts to reconcile modern skepticism with Christian faith, it risks diminishing the historical reality of Jesus, which is central to Christian belief. By contrasting Bultmann’s demythologized Christology with the mythical context of Hinduism and analyzing non-biblical evidence, this paper affirms that the historicity of Jesus is well-supported and integral to the Christian faith. The convergence of the

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refer to a critical and scholarly presentation of secular sources of early Christianity. See, F.F Bruce, *Non-Christian Origins*

<sup>58</sup> Geisler, *Christian Apologetics*, 323. (*Antiquities XX* 9:1).

<sup>59</sup> See Malone, about James “the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ.” Some translators render this phrase as “the so-called Christ.” Either way, it is not a hearty endorsement of Jesus as Christ. It simply states that *some called* Jesus the Christ, which of course was true. Josephus scholar Louis Feldman, tells us “Few have doubted the genuineness of this passage on James.” *Josephus X (LCL 456; London: Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard University, 1965), p. 108.*



historical Jesus with the Jesus of faith is crucial for maintaining both theological integrity and the foundation of Christian practice. Thus, while mythological elements can be reinterpreted, the historical authenticity of Jesus remains indispensable to a robust and meaningful Christian theology.

Bultmann was inconsistent in his use of the term “demythologization,” as he sometimes argues that mythology should be eliminated rather than interpreted. His call for the reinterpretation of the New Testament mirrors his appeal for its complete rewriting, a task that cannot realistically be accomplished. Bultmann’s use of “demythologization” often appears to function as a synonym for symbolism.

Bultmann’s demythologization of Jesus eliminates the possibility of Christ’s deity, which is essential for viewing Christ as the savior of the world. If the divine prerogative of Christ is removed, one is left with a merely human Jesus who lived, suffered, and died without the power to rise again. In the context of religious pluralism in India, it is particularly important to affirm the inseparability of the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. However, Bultmann’s demythologization creates a division between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith as presented in the Kerygma. The Christ of faith cannot be separated from the Jesus of history for two reasons: the death and resurrection of Jesus. That Jesus died on the cross is a historical fact, while his death “for our sins” is a doctrinal belief. Thus, the Christian doctrine of salvation is deeply rooted in the person of the historical Jesus. The Jesus of history and the Christ of faith are one and the same. A proper understanding of Scripture necessitates a proper belief in Christ.

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