

Nicholas Gier

University of Idaho, Moscow

# THE SAVIOUR ARCHETYPE: A STUDY IN THE ESCHATOLOGICAL VISION OF RELIGIONS

One of the most significant discoveries of the science of comparative religion has been what I shall call the "Saviour Archetype." Before we begin the analysis proper let me define the phrase carefully. First, the word "saviour" (from the Latin *Salvo* = to save) means one who "saves" humankind, one who redeems them from sin and death. Second, the word "archetype" (from the Greek *archetypon* = first type) means an original pattern or formal outline. I am not using the term in its Jungian sense; that is, I am not holding any of the questionable assumptions of Jungian psychology. Furthermore, we are not going to speculate about the mechanics of how the archetype originates or operates in the human mind. I am offering this thesis as a descriptive psychology of religion. The objective data are the sacred scriptures of the world's religions as they stand. I am taking these scriptures at face value as empirical testimony of how religious peoples have responded to their respective saviours.

Close scrutiny of the accounts of the alleged saviours of the world's religions shows significant parallels in the saviours' attributes, experiences, and plans for human redemption. From this material I have extracted what seem to be the essential conditions for being a saviour: (1) the saviour's birth and life are foretold in prophecy; (2) the saviour has a miraculous birth; (3) the saviour has a royal genealogy; (4) the saviour is threatened in infancy; (5) the saviour is tempted by demons; (6) the saviour works miracles; (7) the saviour is a deity with a triune nature; (8) the saviour offers redemption through grace; (9) there is a baptism of water and/or fire; (10) there is a communion of bread and wine (water); (11) the saviour condemns those who do not believe; (12) the saviour transfigures himself; (13) the saviour is crucified; and (14) the saviour rises from the dead and ascends into heaven.

It is my general thesis that the Saviour Archetype was not the result of a direct interchange of ideas; rather, it was *sui generis* to the various

religious cultures. I therefore agree with Edward Carpenter's assessment that "it is impossible, I think not to see that the myriad worship of saviours all over the world, from China to Peru, can only be ascribed to the natural workings of some...law of human and tribal psychology—springing up quite spontaneously and independently, and (so far) unaffected by mere contagion of local tradition."<sup>1</sup> Carl G. Jung concurs: "The astonishing parallelism between the images and the ideas they serve to express has frequently given rise to the wildest migration theories, although it would have been far more natural to think of the remarkable similarity of the human psyche at all times and in all places."<sup>2</sup>

This is not to say that some interchange of religious ideas, especially between India and the Near East, did not take place. Probably the strongest case for direct influence can be made for the influx of Zoroastrian ideas into Judaism during the Babylonian captivity and during the later Hellenistic Age.<sup>3</sup> The best scholars disagree about the possible influence of Buddhism on the religions of the Near East. Scholars like A. J. Edmunds base their claim of direct influence on the historically documented missionary effort launched by the Buddhist Emperor Asoka in the 3rd Century B.C.<sup>4</sup> The influence of the religion of Krishna outside India has been minimal (at least until the 20th century).

If there was any substantial historical influence, it would have been from East to West, as the Oriental saviours antedate Jesus Christ by many centuries. There is, however, a good reason to doubt much historical interchange, outside the direct influence of Zoroastrianism on Judaism. My research has shown solid parallels in terms of the general characteristics of the archetype, but the specific details are almost always different. This leads me to conclude that although the Saviour Archetype was in place, each religion supplied its own detail according to its own cultural and religious history. For example,

- 
1. Edward Carpenter, *Pagan and Christian Creeds* (N.Y., 1924), p. 155.
  2. Carl G. Jung, "Psychological Commentary" to *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, ed. W. Y. Evans-Wentz (Oxford, 1960), p. xlv.
  3. R. C. Zaehner, *The Comparison of Religions* (Boston: Beacon, 1958), pp. 134-53.
  4. A. J. Edmunds, *Buddhist and Christian Gospels* (Philadelphia: Innes and Sons 1914), Vol. I, p. 58. But Rhys David states: "I can find no evidence whatever of any actual and direct communication of any of these ideas from the East to the West. Where the Gospel narratives resemble the Buddhist one, they seem to me to have been independently developed...The similarities of ideas are evidence not of any borrowing from the one side or the other, but of similar feelings engendered in men's minds by similar experiences." *Lectures*, pp. 151-52.

Zoroaster's birth and life are foretold in prophecy in a way that shows a unique Persian religious tradition. Both Gautama Buddha and Krishna have miraculous births; but none of the details appear to have been borrowed, even though each religion arose in close proximity to each other in Northern India. Another example is the belief in reincarnation which was held by some Greeks, the Egyptians, and the Indians; but rejected by Moses, Zoroaster, and Jesus. Redemption through a blood sacrifice is central to some Hellenistic mystery religions and Christianity; but absent from Buddhism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, and the Chinese religions.

My principal concern in the remainder of this essay is to show how well the general characteristics of the Saviour Archetype apply to the various saviours. The best compliance occurs with Jesus, Krishna, Gautama Buddha, and Zoroaster. The major divergence in the case of Zoroaster is that he is not the redemptive agent. But I include him because of the otherwise good match with the archetypal characteristics. I also include references to the Hellenistic mystery religions and other religions at appropriate points in the analysis.

### 1. Saviour's Birth and Life are Foretold in Prophecy

Prophecy concerning the birth and life of the saviour plays a central role in the accounts surrounding Jesus, Gautama Buddha (567-487 B.C.), Krishna (ca. 900-800 B.C.)<sup>5</sup> and Zoroaster (628-551 B.C.). (I am omitting the accounts of Jesus, taking it for granted that they are well-known). Right after Gautama's miraculous conception, a voice from the sky speaks to King Suddhodana foretelling that the Buddha, the Enlightened One, will be born of his wife. The King then brings in 64 Brahmin priests who prophesy that if Gautama remains in the royal palace, he will become a monarch; but if he leaves the palace, he will live the life of an ascetic and eventually become the Buddha. A wiseman by the name of Asita (a Buddhist Simeon, see *Luke 2 : 25-34*) comes to the palace saying that a voice from Heaven had told him that a child who would attain supreme knowledge had been born. Like Luke's Simeon, Asita is just about to pass away and his greatest joy is that he has seen the saviour before he dies.<sup>6</sup>

5. Traditionally scholars have taken Krishna to be a fully mythical figure, but some have attempted to reconstruct the historical Krishna. The dates given are those of B. Majumdar in *Krishna in History and Legend* (Calcutta, 1969).

6. *Lalita Vistara*, used primarily in A. F. Herold's *The Life of the Buddha* (C. E. Tuttle, 1954), pp. 9-10; *Buddhacarita*, Vol. I, pp. 54-82; *Nalaka Sutta*, *SBE*, Vol. X, Part 2, pp. 124-130; *Jatakas*, ed. and trans. Rhys David, *Buddhist Birth-Stories* (London, undated), pp. 150, 157 ff. (Note: SBE stands for *Sacred Books of the East*, ed. Max Müller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1880-97),

The Hindu scriptures contain prophecies concerning the birth and life of Krishna. The *Ghata Jataka* tells of a prophecy that a son born of Devaki will destroy the demon-prince Kamsa. The *Bhagavata Purana* repeats the same prophecy, and also contains a prophecy (a voice from the sky to Kamsa) that the eighth child of Devaki will kill him.<sup>7</sup> Zoroaster's coming into the world is foretold in prophecy 3,000 years before his birth. A certain King Yim forewarns the demons that they will be destroyed by a "glorious manchild." Three centuries before Zoroaster's birth an ox speaks and foretells of Zoroaster's mission to the world.<sup>8</sup>

## 2. Saviour has a Miraculous Birth

The idea of a miraculous birth among the saviours of the world is so widespread that a full listing would be prohibitive. Even people not considered saviours, like the philosopher Plato, were said to be born of a virgin. Mahavira, saviour of the Jains, was born of a virgin; so were some of the Roman Caesars; the Mexican saviour Quetzalcoatl; the Chinese saviours; the Greco-Roman gods; and of course Krishna, the Buddha, and Zoroaster. Some of the details are of course different; but some form of parthenogenesis is present, although the saviour's mother is not always a virgin. The traditional Christian objection that the pagan mothers had carnal relations with the gods applies only to some of the Greco-Roman saviours.

Before Gautama's miraculous conception, Queen Maya makes a vow of abstinence and asceticism. One night in a dream a white elephant, symbolizing what Christians would call the Holy Spirit, enters her womb, and effects the divine conception of the Buddha. Gautama is born out of the side of Maya, apparently for the sake of not defiling the birth canal. Appropriately, there was an earthquake at his birth as well as at his conception. At his birth there were celestial signs; the sick were cured; the hungry were fed; madmen returned to sanity; prisons opened their gates; and the wicked were cleansed of all evil.

At the time of Krishna's birth there are auspicious celestial configurations. One star, Rohini, is especially important. Krishna is conceived by the supreme God Vishnu implanting a black hair in the womb of Devaki. Conception is achieved without the aid of Krishna's

7. *Ghata Jataka*, quoted in B. Majumdar, *Op. Cit.*, pp. 57-58; *Mahabharata*, trans. P. Lal (Calcutta, 1971), Vol. 33, p. 14; *Bhagavata Purana*, Tenth Canto, trans. A. C. Bhaktivedanta (Los Angeles, 1970), Vol. 1, p. 3.

8. *Yasnas*, *SBE*, Vol. 31, pp. 10-11; *Dinkard*, *SBE*, Vol. 47, p. 31,

legal father, Vasudeva. Heaven and earth rejoice at the birth of Krishna; and the Vedic gods, particularly Indra, bow down to him.

Zoroaster's mother has an immaculate conception, as she is transformed by the divine light of the supreme God, Ahura Mazda. Her intimacy with God makes her shine so much that her father sends her away as one possessed. Zoroaster is conceived by the same divine light as his mother. The earliest scriptures tell of celestial and terrestrial signs that attend the birth of Zoroaster: all of nature rejoices and the demons flee to the depths of the earth.<sup>9</sup>

### 3. Saviour has a Royal Genealogy

Jesus, Gautama, Krishna, and Zoroaster all are said to have descended from kings. Gautama is born into the royal Sakya family and before his enlightenment, he lives the life of a prince. Krishna comes from a royal family, the Sattvata family, of the Yadu dynasty in North-West India. But because of the threats of the demon-prince Kamsa, he is raised by cowherds in the countryside. As in the case of Jesus, Zoroaster's genealogy is traced from the first man, an Iranian Adam called Gayomart, through a royal line of ancient Persia to his own father. Some of the scripture offers conflicting genealogies for the same saviour, Jesus and Gautama being good examples.

### 4. Saviour is Threatened in Infancy

Jesus, Krishna, and Zoroaster were all threatened in infancy by a demon prince or king. Herod's slaughter of the infants is not mentioned by Josephus, the Jewish historian who hated Herod and chronicles his life in great detail. If this incident in Jesus' life is set in the context of similar accounts in the lives of Krishna and Zoroaster, an explanation from the Saviour Archetype readily offers itself.

Because of the prophecy to Kamsa that a child of Devaki would usurp his throne, Kamsa imprisons Devaki and Vasudeva and kills each of their children in turn. When the eighth child Krishna is born divine intervention allows Vasudeva to break out of prison and cross a river in flood, aided by a miracle wrought by the infant Krishna. Krishna is exchanged for a girl born at the same time in a cowherd

---

9. *Jatakas*, pp. 150-152; *Buddhacarita*, Vol. I, pp. 25-45; *Lalita Vistara*, pp. 13-14; *Bhagavata Purana*, Vol. 1, p. 23; *Mahabharata*, Lal trans. Vol. 33, p. 15; *Yasnas, SBE*, Vol. 31, p. 235; *Yashts, SBE*, Vol. 23, pp. 212, 274; *Dinkard, SBE*, Vol. 47, pp. 18-20.

camp. Kamsa comes the next morning and attempts to murder the infant girl. Knowing that a trick has been played on him, he orders a general massacre of all male infants in his realm. Krishna, like Jesus, escapes this fate. The Zoroastrian *Dinkard* tells the story of a wicked ruler who repeatedly and vainly attempts to kill the young Zoroaster. For example, Zoroaster is cast into a fire and miraculously saves himself.<sup>10</sup>

### 5. Saviour is Tempted by Demons

After finally leaving his palace, Gautama fasts, meditates, and is continually tempted and threatened by the demon, Mara. In the first temptation the evil Mara offers Gautama the greatest kingdom in the world and Gautama of course refuses. Throughout his childhood, Krishna is tempted and threatened by demons. He succeeds in avoiding or killing them all. For seven years Zoroaster wanders alone in the desert, having visions and talking with God himself. He is also tempted by demons; he offer him an empire and propound riddles. The devils flee at his sight (just as in the case of Jesus), because they know of his ultimate power.<sup>11</sup>

### 6. Saviour Works Miracles

During his childhood Gautama amazes his teachers with his knowledge and his miracles. Other miracles attributed to Gautama were throwing an elephant across a moat, shooting an arrow ten miles, and flying through the air. His disciples could also fly, and one of his disciples walked on water upon the beckoning of the Buddha. From the very beginning, Krishna worked miracles, usually in his battle against evil. His first miracle as a new born infant is the calming and apparent splitting of the flood waters of the Yamuna river. He also heals and brings the dead back to life, e.g., reviving a stillborn child. Zoroaster performs many miracles, especially in his fights with demons. He divides the seas so that he can cross; he heals; he is immune from a raging fire into which he is cast by demons.<sup>12</sup>

10. *Bhagavata Purana*, Vol. 1, pp. 32-36. *Dinkard*, pp. 29-30, 37.

11. *Jatakas*, pp. 190 ff.; Pali scripture quoted in E. J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1927), p. 54. *Yashts*, p. 305; *Vendidad, SBE*, Vol. 4, pp. 208-217.

12. *Jatakas*, pp. 164-165; *Buddhacarita*, Vol. II, 24; *Lalita Vistara*, pp. 24-27. *Bhagavata Purana*, Vol. 1, p. 31; *Mahabharata*, a condensed version, ed. C. V. Narasimhan (N.Y.: Columbia, 1965), pp. 196-197. *Dinkard*, pp. 37, 66,

## 7. Saviour is a Triune Deity

The tendency for religious peoples to deify their spiritual and political leaders is readily apparent in all cultures. The best scholars disagree about how soon the deification of Gautama took place. Rhys David believes that it took place soon after his death, but other scholars contend that it took place somewhat later with the rise of Mahayana Buddhism. The Sanskrit scripture makes no secrets of his divinity: he is "a god surpassing all gods" (*devatideva*) and in the *Buddhacarita* the infant Gautama is worshipped by all the Vedic gods.<sup>13</sup> Mahayana Buddhism believed that the Buddha had three manifestations or bodies the Body of Bliss, the Body of Law, and the Body of Transformation (the historical Gautama).

Krishna is the human incarnation of the God Vishnu, whom Krishna devotees consider to be the supreme God. For devotees Krishna is the supreme personality of the Godhead and is the source of all the other eight incarnations of Vishnu. According to Hari Krishna scholars, the Godhead is triune with Brahma, Paramatma as the Over soul or Holy Spirit, and the human form of Krishna being the three manifestations.<sup>14</sup>

Zoroaster has a pre-existent spiritual body and is the incarnation of the second person of Ahura Mazda, divine wisdom or reason. *Yasht XIV* portrays him as a perfect being: "He thought according to the Law, spoke according to the Law, and did according to the Law: So that he was the holiest in holiness in all the living world, the best ruling in exercising rule, the brightest in brightness, and the most victorious in victory." The Zoroastrian Godhead is seven-fold rather than triune. The religion of Mithra, a later development of Zoroastrianism, does return to a three-fold deity with Ahur Mazda as Father, Mithra as Son, and Anashita, a goddess, as the third person.

## 8. Saviour Offers Redemption Through Grace

Mahayana Buddhism in its devotional forms requires a personal relationship with a Bodhisattva (an intermediary for the heavenly Buddha) for salvation. The Bodhisattva is a suffering saviour who "will give up his body and his life" for the deliverance of humankind. In

13. T. W. Rhys David, *Buddhism* (London, 1894), pp. 182-183. *Lalita Vistara*, p. 23.

14. Satsvarupa dasa Gosvami, *Readings in Vedic Literature* (Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, 1977), pp. 21-25.

the *Siksamuccaya* of Shantideva we find the following monologue of a Bodhisattva :

For I have taken upon myself, by my own will, the whole of the pain of all things living. Thus I dare try every abode of pain, in . . . every part of the universe, for I must not defraud the world of the root of good. I resolve to dwell in each state of misfortune through countless ages . . . for the salvation of all beings . . . for it is better that I alone suffer than that all being sink to the worlds of misfortune. There I shall give myself into bondage, to redeem all the world from the forest of purgatory, from rebirth as beasts, from the realm of death.<sup>15</sup>

Unique to the *bhakti yoga* of the religion of Krishna is the idea of personal devotion to the saviour. According to the *Gita* (2.12) all those, regardless of class or race, who seek refuge in Krishna will be saved by his grace; they shall also gain eternal life in an individualized soul. Krishna killed many demons who were immediately liberated, their souls merging with Krishna's or being dispatched immediately to heaven. These are obviously cases of unconditional redemption. In some versions of the *Mahabharata* the hunter that "accidentally" kills Krishna is immediately dispatched to heaven, without any evidence that he had devoted himself to Krishna.

In the *Gita* Arjuna is completely confused and during Krishna's transfiguration is frightened to the edge of his life. It is obvious that Arjuna is not a devotee and does not understand the nature of faith. Nonetheless Krishna bestows his grace on Arjuna in a very special way. "Arjuna said, my dear Krishna, O infallible one, my illusion is now gone. I have regained by memory by your mercy, and I am now firm and free from doubt and am prepared to act according to your instructions" (18.73).

There is no question that Christianity and the Hellenistic mystery religions are strong in their emphasis on literal blood redemption. But there is a strong element of sacrifice in both Bhagavatism and Mahayana Buddhism. In Christianity the wages of sin is death; therefore, the sacrificial death of the saviour is seen as a payment for all sin. In Hinduism the wages of sin is rebirth; therefore the sacrificial death comes at the *birth* of the universe. The *Gita* makes Krishna the Purusa, the first human who is sacrificed for the creation of the heaven and earth. The notion of Krishna as sacrifice is also found in the *Gita*:

15. Excerpted in *The Buddhist Tradition*, ed. W. T. deBary (Vintage, 1972), p. 85,



“But it is I who am the ritual, I am the sacrifice, the offering to the ancestor....” (9.16). As we have seen above, the Bodhisattva is prepared to sacrifice everything (“give up his body and his life”) for human salvation.

### 9. Baptism of Water and Fire

Baptism is a pre-Christian practice. The Jews performed baptism only after their return from Babylonian captivity. The Hindu *Vedas*, the oldest known religious writings, already contain baptismal formulas that have led to Hindu practice of daily purification in the sacred waters of Indian rivers. The *Rig Veda* states: “Whatever sin is found in me, whatever evil I have wrought, if I have lied or falsely sworn, Waters, remove it far from me” (I.23.22). As to a baptism of fire, this can be traced to pagan sources also. Initiates in the religion of Mithra, as attested by the Christian Father Tertullian, were branded on the forehead with a searing iron. A final conflagration, another view of the baptism of fire, is found in Zoroastrian and Hindu eschatology.

### 10. A Communion of Bread and Wine

A communion or sacred meal also comes from pagan sources. The *Rig Veda* again is the oldest source: “By Holy Law long lasting food they bring us” (IV. 23.9). The soma sacrifice of the Hindus gave the participants intimations of immortality. Zoroastrians mixed the soma juice with bread and water for their communion. The cultic meal of Mithra was so much like Christian Communion that Tertullian (155–230 C.E.) and Justin Martyr (110–165 C.E.) propounded the fable that Satan must have given the Communication to the Mithraists so as to mislead Christians.<sup>16</sup> Devotees of Mithra celebrated his birth on December 25th and his resurrection at Easter time (March 25th). Before his ascent into Heaven, Mithra had a sacred meal of bread and wine with his twelve disciples.<sup>17</sup>

### 11. Saviour Condemns Unbelievers

Early on Buddhism developed doctrines of Heaven and Hell just as detailed as, and in many ways similar to, the Christian accounts.

16. Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, Section 66.

17. E. Wynne-Tyson, *Mithras* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1958), p. 139. Sacred meals of bread and wine were also eaten in the rites of Dionysos and Orpheus,

In the *Gita* (1.44) Krishna elaborates in detail the fate of those who do not turn to him: the Hell of eternal rebirth. Krishna acts in the same capacity as the second person of the Christian Trinity: "I am the creator of all objects that exist. Knowing no change myself, I am also the destroyer of all creatures that live in sinfulness."<sup>18</sup>

The Zoroastrian doctrines of Heaven and Hell were strong influences on Hellenistic Judaism and early Christianity. It is here where the psychology of the Saviour Archetype gives way to actual historical borrowing. For example, the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal that the Jewish Essenes had a detailed knowledge of the eschatology we find in the Zoroastrian *Bundahish*. The supreme God Ahura Mazda gives all humans free-will so that they may choose between good and evil. Saosyant, a saviour born from Zoroaster's seed, will come and the dead shall be resurrected, body and soul. As the final accounting is made, husband is set against wife and brother against brother as the righteous and the damned are pointed out by the divine judge Saosyant. Personal and individual immortality is offered to the righteous; and, as a final fire melts away the world and the damned, a kingdom of God is established for a thousand years.<sup>19</sup>

## 12 Saviour Transfigures Himself

A transfiguration is an act on the part of the human incarnation of God in which the saviour's divinity is revealed in its fullness. Jesus transfigures himself before his disciples in *Mark* 9 and *Matthew* 17. There are at least three transfigurations in the life of Krishna: at his birth, during the Bharata War, and just before his ascension into heaven at his death. Transfigurations of Gautama Buddha occur at his birth, during his fights with the demon Mara, and at his death.<sup>20</sup>

## 13. Saviour is Crucified

The four-cornered cross (without a crucified figure) is found as a symbol in almost every major religion. The cross with a crucified figure, i.e., a crucifix, first appears to be limited to religions of the Roman Empire, where crucifixion of course was a common form of execution

18. *Mahabharata*, ed. Narasimhan, p. 195.

19. *Yashts*, pp. 220-222; 306-307; *Bundahish* in *Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East* (New York, 1917), pp. 179-184.

20. *Bhagavata Purana*, Vol. 1, pp. 24 ff; *Gita*, Chapter II; *Buddhacarita*, Vol. I, p. 30; *Lalita Vistara*, p. 286; *Nipato Sutta*, *SBE*, Vol. 10, p. 126; Thomas, p. 74.

If we define a crucifixion as being tied or nailed to a cross, i.e. an upright post with a horizontal bar, then one cannot even be sure if Jesus was executed in this manner. The New Testament uses two Greek words in reference to the Crucifixion: *stauros*, an upright stake, and *xylon*, meaning wood. Many scholars believe that Jesus was most likely executed on a simple stake rather than on an actual cross.<sup>21</sup>

We also know from Roman history that crucifixions were performed on trees as well. Describing the pagan crosses as untrimmed logs or trees, Tertullian speculates that the pagan worship of the cross came from the veneration of the male phallus.<sup>22</sup> If we broaden the definition of crucifixion this far, then it is clear that other peoples knew of crucifixion: Robert Graves in *The Greek Myths* talks of Canaanite crucifixions and J. G. Frazer in *The Golden Bough* has found religious crucifixions among the pre-Christian Philipinos.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most surprising facts in the works of Tertullian and Minucius Felix (d. 250 C.E.) is their vociferous disavowal of the crucifix as a standard for Christianity. The main reason for this rejection of the crucifix is clear: the existence of pagan crucifixes connected with the worship of crucified saviours. The following passages make this point explicit :

Minucius Felix : Crosses again we neither worship nor set our hopes on. You who consecrate gods of wood, very possibly a dore wooden crosses as being portions of your gods. For what are your standards, and banners, and ensigns but gilded and decorated crosses? Your trophies of victory show not only the figure of a simple cross, but also of one crucified (*adfixi hominis imitanur*).

Tertullian : We have said that in the first instance your gods are moulded by the sculptors on a cross. But you also adore victories, and in all trophies the cross is the inner structure of the trophy. Roman religion, every bit of it a religion of camps, venerates the standards, swears by the standards, sets the standards before all

- 
21. Alan Watts, *Myth and Ritual in Christianity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968), p. 158.
  22. Tertullian's *Apology* and Minucius Felix's *Octavius*, trans. T. R. Glover (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), Vol. XVI, lines 6-7, p. 83.
  23. J. G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (condensed version) (New York: Macmillan, 1960), p. 412. Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* (Penguin Books, 1960), Sec. 91.4.

the gods. All those rows of images on the standards are but ornaments hung on crosses."<sup>24</sup>

Who were these other crucified saviours? The Christian Fathers do not tell us. One possibility is the Milesian Apollo mentioned by the Christian Lactantius (b. 250 C.E.): "He was a mortal according to the flesh; wise in miraculous works; but, being arrested by an armed force by the command of the Chaldean judges, he suffered a death made bitter with nails and stakes."<sup>25</sup>

The pagan saviour might have been Attis, born of the virgin Nana, who sacrificed himself under a pine tree and bled to death on the spot. His death was interpreted as a redemption for human sin; he was said to have descended into Hell; and he was resurrected.<sup>26</sup> In the earliest rites, held in the spring or mid-summer, a priest of Attis allowed himself to be crucified on a tree and pierced in the side with a spear. Later devotees of Attis made an effigy of their dead god, tied it to a pine log, pierced it with spears, offered their own blood in imitation, placed the effigy in a tomb, and sang resurrection hymns such as this one: "Be of good courage, Oh ye of our mystery, for our God is saved, for us there shall be salvation after our sorrows."<sup>27</sup>

The Christian fathers could also have been referring to Tammuz, the god connected with the Canaanite crucifixions mentioned above.<sup>28</sup> The Greeks called him Adonis (Hebrew *Adon* = Lord), mistaking his honorific title "Lord" for his real name Tammuz. The resurrection of Tammuz was celebrated by impaling an effigy of the dead saviour and by singing resurrection hymns.

#### 14. Saviour Rises from the Dead and Ascends into Heaven

At his birth Gautama prophesies that this will be his last life. In the *Buddhacarita* and the Pali accounts of his life, the Buddha escapes death and the cycle of rebirth, transfigures himself, and ascends into

24. *Octavius*, Vol. XXIX, 6-7, p. 407. *Apology*, Vol. XVI, lines 6-9, pp. 83-85.

25. *The Divine Institutes*, Book Four, Ch. 13.

26. L. R. Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896), Vol. 2, pp. 644-645. For the vicarious suffering of Attis, see W. F. Albright, *From the Stone Age to Christianity* (Doubleday Anchor, 1957), p. 329.

27. Frazer, p. 405; the hymn is quoted in Farnell, Vol. 3, p. 301.

28. Robert Graves, *Op. Cit.*, Sec. 18.6.7; 26.5; 91.4. J. W. Perry, *Lord of the Four Quarters* (Collier Books, 1963), pp. 67-71. For his descent into Hell, see Albright, p. 397.

heaven. One of his disciples and Gautama's mother also ascend directly into heaven. Krishna himself and wise sages foretell his death and the demise of his tribe. His own people, the Yadavas, betray him and set about on a course of self-destruction, which together with Krishna's own death, is traditionally interpreted as having redemptive significance. Krishna transfigures himself and prepares to leave his body as death approaches. Krishna then ascends immediately into Heaven, "filling the entire sky with splendour."<sup>29</sup>

### 15. Qualifications and Conclusions

In this essay I have attempted to articulate some of the essential features of the Saviour Archetype. It must be emphasized that we have taken the various scriptures at face value and have not delved into the vast historical-critical scholarship on these religions. It must also be reiterated that the parallels drawn have been general (i.e. archetypal) and the implication that these saviours are specifically the same in person or deed is obviously incorrect. One general conclusion can be drawn from the Saviour Archetype: devotees of great spiritual leaders have been led by some social-psychological reasons to attribute a certain set of characteristics and experiences to the nature and life of their masters. They have deified them with supernatural attributes; they have produced similar legends about their births and lives; and they have celebrated similar sacred rituals and sacraments in their names.

---

29. *Lalita Vistara*, pp. 21, 286; *Buddhacarita*, Vol. II, p. 18; Edmunds, *Op. Cit.*, Vol. 2, p. 174; *Mahabharata*, Lal trans., Vol. 34, p. 49; *Mahabharata*, Narasimhan ed., pp. 203, 205; Majumdar, pp. 163-164; W. G. Archer, *The Loves of Krishna* (London: Allan and Unwin, 1957), pp. 68-69, 117.