

## The Christ Conspiracy – Book review:

In "The Christ Conspiracy, The Greatest Story Ever Sold"<sup>1</sup>, author Acharya S denies the existence of an historical Jesus, and argues that the Christian gospel is a "carnalized" (a term she frequently uses) reenactment of an ancient and repeating solar mythos. Chapter titles such as "The Son of God is the Sun of God" and "The Disciples are the Signs of the Zodiac", adequately bespeak the Pagan orientation of the author. Acharya (meaning spiritual leader) is zealous to expose the God Man Jesus as an invention of evemerists<sup>2</sup> and the Old and New Testaments as writings rife with collusion and deceit, co-opted in large measure from previous texts.

How then has Christianity prevailed over the centuries? The author writes, "not because of any evidence, but merely because they have been told it was so and blindly accepted it, against common sense and better judgement. " 407). "They have been pawns, unwitting or otherwise...under a false front of historicity, by the most thorough of methods, including secrecy, forgery, force and destruction." (376).

In this paper, I undertake to review the author's assertions against the bible as they relate to the questions of factual reliability, accuracy, and inerrancy. Indeed, the author prefaces her chapter "Biblical Sources" with an invitation to "examine the 'evidence' left to us by these pious forgers as to the 'historicity' of the great savior and godman Jesus Christ". (30). I shall critique that examination by discussing a number of statements and concepts that she stridently employs. Though often sarcastic and generally ill disposed towards Christianity, the author's challenges to textual antiquity and divine inspiration (and therefore ultimate authority) beg an effective Christian defense.

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<sup>1</sup> Acharya S, *The Christ Conspiracy, The Greatest Story Ever Sold*. Adventures Unlimited Press, 1999

<sup>2</sup> From the author's website, "Evemerism," named after Evemerus, a 4th Century B.C.E. Greek philosopher who developed the idea that, rather than being mythological creatures as was accepted by the reigning intellectuals, the gods of old were in fact historical characters, kings, emperors and heroes whose exploits were then deified

Attacks on the divine inspiration of Holy Scripture typically form lines along two fronts - process and presupposition. The former questions how God could communicate truth to finite beings who are prone to error. The latter presupposes that some other reality obtains than that which is enshrined in Christian theism; this would demand the exclusion of miracles and supernatural activity, as well as infer some malevolent intent by person(s) involved in the creation and transmitting of the texts in question. "The Christ Conspiracy" is an application of the latter. "Thus Christianity [is]...is without inspired authorship of apostles under an infallible God". (47). For example, the author quotes German scholar G.A. Wells (not a biblical scholar) who finds it absurd that Matthew 2:16-18 could possibly be construed as a fulfillment of Jeremiah 31:15. This, he follows, can only be the result of "twisting" and "torturing". No other handling of the text in Matthew or Jeremiah is offered. Does Wells consider Jeremiah to be scripture, but erroneously applied here in Matthew? Or does he deny the possibility of prophecy under the inspiration of God? Jeremiah 31 speaks prophetically of God's actions towards Israel, both in judgement and deliverance. How does one deduce twisting from a New Testament context in complete accord with that deliverance, as we see in the Christian Messiah?

Acharya argues that both Old Testament and New Testament "redactions" are more "polite" examples of "mutilation" and "forgery". I shall cite the argument regarding Moses (the JDEP theory) she offers later. However, as Michael Grasanti has well argued for, such redactions or textual updating indeed fit into the Christian doctrine of inspiration. He writes, "the reliability of the biblical doctrine of inspiration guarantees the accuracy and infallibility of the book until it reaches its final stage of composition".<sup>3</sup> Concerning the Epistles of 1 and 2 John she writes, "These 'heretics' [Gnostics]<sup>4</sup> were so common that the conspirators had to forge the two Epistles of John to combat and threaten them". (65) Rather than refuting the possibility of inspiration here,

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<sup>3</sup> Grisanti, Michael A. *Inspiration, Inerrancy, and the O.T. Canon: The Place of Textual Updating in an Inerrant View of Scripture*, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society. Dec. 2001, p. 578

<sup>4</sup> I note here that Acharya is not asserting that Gnosticism was heresy, indeed she insists Christianity was first Gnostic, and changes later. I shall address this more specifically below.

she simply agrees with her source Godfrey Higgins, that these Johannine passages would only be necessary if John lacked sufficient proof of Christ's existence. That is merely opinion, and the conclusion is far greater than the premise. John was likely refuting and condemning Docetism in these passages, and Acharya simply reasserts her view that Jesus never existed, either spiritually or physically.

In a discussion of the physical appearance of Jesus, Acharya mocks the "so called" apostles for not being able to recall what Jesus looked like. The implication is that the authors were not inspired from above, for the same men who could supposedly recite Jesus' words "verbatim", could not testify as to His appearance. But one does not follow from the other. There is nothing to tell us what any figure "looks like" in scripture with a few exceptions, nor does it have any bearing on the message or the messenger. We would expect no further discussion of Jesus' appearance, as the prophet Isaiah makes it a point to dismiss any such significance.<sup>5</sup>

No attempt to disprove the inspiration of scripture would be complete without a mythological explanation for the creation accounts found in Genesis, and here the author does not disappoint. She also writes, "nor has the biblical story ever been adequate to explain truly the origin of the cosmos;"(184). There is no discussion of the texts or treatment of any of the four major views of creation commonly held by orthodox Christians or Hebrew exegetes, or how the Genesis text accords with modern Big Bang cosmology.

Did Moses receive the Ten Commandments from the "finger of God", as Scripture affirms? Not according to Acharya. She quotes from her source Col. James Churchward, "The 'Law of Moses' were the old Egyptian Laws...; this the Stele or 'Code of Hammurabi' conclusively proves. Moses lived 1,000 years after this stone was engraved". (244). Moses may have lived after the Code of Hammurabi, but that speaks nothing of the divine hand in the giving of the commandments. Furthermore, the Law of Moses differed in a significant way from any of its so-called predecessors. Daniel Block writes, "In this regard Moses' Torah differs radically

from Hammurabi's Law Code, whose concern was to govern the conduct of his subjects, not himself...neither here nor in any other ancient Near East document do we find a king enjoined to write 'for himself' a copy of the laws...to rein in his own exercise of power".<sup>6</sup> A greater King, the Lord, could certainly enjoin such writ, and do so by divine inspiration. Her analogy fails, so then does her conclusion.

Two more examples from Acharya's treatment of New Testament scripture will serve to demonstrate the weakness of her argument against inspiration. The Passion, in her view, "is easily revealed to be a play through a number of clues" For example, Jesus is made to pray three times while His disciples are asleep, such that no one is there to hear or see the scene, yet it is recorded." (204) The audience at the play, she continues, would know. But this stretches credulity to the breaking point for three reasons. First, such a view of the passion has no prominence in classic arguments against Christianity, and hence has never been taken seriously. Second, the scriptures do not force the conclusion that the apostles immediately fell asleep. Luke records that Jesus went a "stones throw" away and fell down and began to pray. Either apostle may well have heard him, but they were so full of sorrow, they fell asleep regardless of Jesus agony. Finally, one can only dismiss the possibility that God gave them that information later if that same one can successfully argue that God did not inspire man to write. Acharya's arguments do not satisfy that standard as she assumes the very thing she needs to prove.

According to Scripture, Jesus was crucified and this was recorded under divine inspiration by New Testament authors. But according to Acharya, the crucifixion was actually the "crossification" of the sun through the equinoxes. And this is what accounts for alleged differences in the gospel narratives. Forcing her astrological Pagan worldview on the text, she concludes that Mary was missing from one account but not the other. This, she continues, is because in the one instance the constellation Virgo is a factor, and the in the other it is not. The

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<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 53:1-3

gospels do not speak of two different times of the crucifixion at all, particularly as it happened following the Passover feast, and as fulfillment if it, on the 14<sup>th</sup> Day of the Month of Nisan. Furthermore, because Mary is not mentioned in one does not mean that she was not there. Often the gospels stress different aspects of the same scene, and as long as these are not contradictory, there is no warrant to dismiss them in the author's fashion. Instances such as those mentioned above abound in the author's work. I have refuted a handful of those arguments and her method as applies to the question of inspiration, and will now turn to the implications of her view on *canonicity*.

Ultimately of course in the author's view, there is no "canon", for God has not spoken and Jesus did not exist. But Acharya's record of the dates for much of the New Testament is fallacious and many of her comments about the development of the Canon are simply inaccurate. Most sorely lacking is a respect for the science of textual criticism which any document of antiquity is subject to. And addressing the gathering of church councils that often gathered to discuss canon, she writes, "these councils were not peaceful gatherings of 'the good shepherds of Christ' but raucous free-for-alls between bands of thugs and their arrogant and insane bishops". (31) Her assertion that it took well over a thousand years to canonize the New Testament does not hold, for since the Councils of Hippo and Carthage (393, 397) there has been no serious questioning of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament.<sup>7</sup>

As mentioned above, Acharya notes that the JDEP theory applies against Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, standard fare that has been responded to by scholars for years. But the author, as is regrettably typical in her treatment of Judeo Christian history, does not even mention the scholarly debate. Rather than recognize that the various Hebrew names for God reflect various theological themes in Jewish thought, she writes off the practice as an attempt by

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<sup>6</sup> Block, Daniel I., *Recovering the Voice of Moses: The Genesis of Deuteronomy*. JETS, September 201, p. 396

<sup>7</sup> McDowall, Joshua, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, Here's Life Publishers, San Bernadino, CA 1972 . p .38

"the conspirators" to suggest harmony and unity where there isn't any. The author also demands that *The Book of Jasher*", mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2 Samuel 1:18, was thereby given "scriptural authority (canonical status). Because of its so-called "astrological themes" though, she continues, the book was suppressed. In truth, reference is at times made to non-canonical books, in the Old Testament. The historical books refer to "the Annals of the books of the Kings". And in the New Testament, the *Book of Enoch* may have been mentioned in Jude. All that this suggests is that some bit of information in those books had some bearing on the subject at hand. Paul mentioned pagan poets while in no way ascribing scriptural authority to them.

According to Acharya S, the Book of Acts was written in 177 CE, the Gospel of Luke in 170 CE, The Gospel of John in 178 CE, the Gospel of Mark 175 CE, and the Gospel of Matthew 180 CE. If she is correct, then we may dismiss each of those books as canon given the criteria for canonical status appreciated throughout church history. Robert Bowman summarizes these criteria as apostolicity, antiquity (first generation church leader), authenticity, ubiquity and catholicity.<sup>8</sup> Much of the material in these books, she argues, comes from the earlier "Christian Gnostic" (heretic) Marcion. But this is readily dismissed by the facts that argue strongly for earlier dating, and that the vast majority of scholars agree on. The book of Acts ends with Paul in Prison, around 62 AD. The Gospel of Luke (the same Luke who wrote the book of the Acts of the Apostles) was written prior to the Acts of the Apostles as the prologue in Acts 1 indicates. And there is no reason to accept Acharya's assertion that the Theophilus to whom each book was addressed was the late second century Bishop of Antioch. Besides, why would a Christian bishop need such a theodicy? Christian apologist Greg Koukl writes, "All scholars place Mark (and many place Matthew) before Luke. This means three full Gospels and an extensive history of the early church were circulating within 30 years of the crucifixion, with Mark much earlier, easily 15-20 years from the resurrection, well within the limit of reliable historiography."<sup>9</sup> It is also

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<sup>8</sup> Bowman, Robert, *Scripture, Outline Studies in Authority, Canon, and Criticism*. Biola University p. 32

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.str.org/weblog/blog\\_archives/archive-022005.htm](http://www.str.org/weblog/blog_archives/archive-022005.htm)

significant that the Book of Acts never mentions the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, a cataclysmic event for Jewish people in that time and for history. The author's claim then cannot bear the weight of serious textual criticism and scholarship.

Acharys S makes several mentions of the "thousands of errors", "contradictions" and "inconsistencies" found throughout the Bible. If she is correct, then the Christian doctrine of inerrancy is false and the Bible is neither accurate nor factually reliable. I will address a few of her conclusions here as they typify her methodology. First it must be stated and is understood by textual critics that many of the thousands of errors, so called, are not errors in the originals, but errors by copyists, etc. Even without access to the originals however, studies of the texts and comparisons of the types and occurrences of errors often makes finding out what must have been the originals a rather rudimentary exercise. The author either does not know or fails to mention that the "errors" and overwhelmingly inconsequential variants exist as a function of the enormous numbers of manuscripts available today, over 5,300 Greek manuscripts as well as those in the Semitic languages. Early church fathers also quoted extensively from the NT canonical writings in their own writings. These men spoke in wrote in the same Greek as the New Testament writers. These Patristic writings (dating through 325 AD) cite NT scriptures in 32,000 instances. Scholar J. Harold Greenlee writes "These quotations are so extensive that the New Testament could virtually be reconstructed from them without the use of New Testament Manuscripts."<sup>10</sup> Given these realities and the exceeding rate at which the originals were multiplied and spread throughout the ancient Mediterranean, the kind of wholesale trickery and changing of the story Arhcrya argues for simply could not have happened.

The author further argues that Adam was not historical and that the fall in Eden never took place. The account of the fall she writes, "is why Christian proponents are so vehemently opposed to the theory of evolution, as it demonstrates the lack of an original fall or sin that requires a

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<sup>10</sup>Greenlee, J. Harold, *An Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, P. 54, as quoted in many sources.

savior." (188). Certainly the lack of a fall would preclude the necessity of salvation, but this has nothing to do with her statement; and there are those Christian theists that argue for "theistic evolution". Furthermore, while some Christians over time have contributed to the caricature of anti-science, Christians and any others open to the evidence resist the type of undirected, random processes that strict naturalists argue for, *because* the evidence indicates otherwise.

Archarya insists in several places that Nazareth did not exist at the time of Jesus. Yet archeologist Werner Keller writes, "Old Nazareth has left many traces behind. It lay further up the hill than the modern village... Yet old-time Nazareth was not wholly out of touch with the busy world... The Roman military road from the north... passed Nazareth on its way".<sup>11</sup> The author also argues that NT chronology is often wrong. For example, she notes a source that concludes the date of Jesus' baptism could not be as it is recorded in Scripture, for the Tetrarch Lysanius ruled from 40 BCE until his execution by Mark Antony in 36 BCE, thirty years before Jesus birth. In addition to Luke's reputation as an accurate historian who typically recorded officials and places with precise nomenclature, there may well have been another Lysanius, and "Lysanius the Tetrarch" does appear on an inscription of the period A.D.14-29.<sup>12</sup> Acharya S claims that there is no evidence of the desert wanderings or "historical" exodus. Ken Boa and Robert Bowman Jr. point out that *The Admonitions of Ipuwer*, an Egyptian writing predating Christ by at least a thousand years, records several historical events remarkably similar to what we find in the ten plagues.<sup>13</sup> Archarya also notes that such events would have become famous throughout the region. Yet we see this very occurrence in the book of Joshua. Rehab the Jericho Harlot remarks, " For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea for you when you came out of Egypt...and as soon as we heard these things, our hearts melted." (2:10-11). Finally (though examples abound), Acharya S observes the lack of physical evidence for the

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<sup>11</sup> Werner Keller - *The Bible as History*, William Morrow and Co. Publishers, NY, 1956 pp.361-362

<sup>12</sup> Wycliffe Bible Dictionary, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA 1975, 9.1059

<sup>13</sup> Boa, Kenneth & Bowman, Robert Jr., *20 Compelling Evidence that God Exists*, River Oak Publishing, Tulsa Ok. 2002 pp. 142-143. (problems with chronology noted).

existence of Jesus Christ as further support for her conclusion. Perhaps she has a point, as the most important piece of evidence is decidedly missing - the body of Jesus Christ!

"Wellhausen rightly said Jesus would have no place in history unless he died and returned exactly as the Gospels said...despite centuries of research, no historical Jesus has come to light...it was mythical to the core". (337) The response to this of course is not new, but needs to be repeated here. The simplest way to refute the resurrection story would have been for anyone at the time to produce the body. Stealing it would have been impossible given the sealing of the tomb and the Roman guards. Paul declared that Jesus appeared to over 500 witnesses, many of whom were still alive; and his credal statement in 1 Cor. 15 attests to the early belief that Christ indeed rose from the dead. "The short time span between Christ's crucifixion and the early composition of the Christian creed precludes the possibility of legendary corruption...[Julius Mueller] challenged scholars of the mid nineteenth century to show anywhere in history where within thirty years a great series of legends had accumulated...and had become fixed in general belief. Mueller's challenge has never been met."<sup>14</sup> Also, the gospel narratives feature the appearance of Jesus to women first, a surprising testimony in light of the fact that Jewish women had no legal status. Of course the radical change in the apostles from cowering defeatists to roaring lions of the faith who all died (except John who was exiled) for their belief in the resurrected Jesus, attests to the veracity of scripture as well.

*The Christ Conspiracy* abounds with these varieties of problems, in addition to a number of mischaracterization, deliberate or otherwise. Acharya insists that Paul was Gnostic, and even that Jesus statement's were Gnostic (though he did not exist!) These hermeneutic issues are outside the parameters of this review, but are duly noted for any that would read her book. Church fathers are constantly assailed and quoted in partial context. Even one of the earliest church fathers

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<sup>14</sup> Craig, William Lane, as quoted in *The Third Day*, Hanegraaff, Hank, W Publishing Group, Nashville TN, 2003 pp.44-45

Irenaeus, disciple of Polycarp, the disciple of John, is accused of Gnosticism, in spite of his great work *Against Heresies*, where he condemns Gnosticism.

Quoting one of her sources, Acharya writes, "Few believe in any religion because they have examined the evidence of its authenticity... we believe what we are taught; and those are most fanatical who know least of the evidences on which their creed is based." (2). I agree with her in part, particularly the latter part of the quote. But she is increasingly wrong about the "few" who examine evidences. This paper has examined the author's evidence against the evidence, and she is found out of balance. It is not that she has not put much work into her book. She has. She references many secondary sources (though in error) and provides a very useful index. *The Christ Conspiracy* is 422 pages, a strenuous effort in a sound bite age. Acharya S also does well to note the horrors that "Christians" have inflicted in the name of Christ over the ages. Some of her examples are poor, though. For example, Hitler is classified as a Christian. No religion should be defined by the behavior of alleged adherents that usurp its tenets for unholy gain. Acharya does a tremendous disservice by never once mentioning the good things Christianity has produced - charities, scientists, scholars, philanthropies and very good neighbors. Holy Scripture is replete with exhortations to love and mercy, justice and goodness to fellow man, care for the earth and for animal creatures therein, and good stewardship of the Creator's abundant provisions. Even a biased mention of these would be a welcome inclusion.

Acharya S concludes that "through contrivance and duplicity, the fish-god 'Jesus', the Piscean Solar Avitar, has indeed been with us, but now it is the close of the age, and his time is over." (416) Her astrological worldview is a-historical and borders on hysteria. It has prejudiced her examination of the abundant evidence available for the historical Jesus, His authority, His great love for fallen mankind, and thereby wrongly answers one of Jesus' most important questions, "*Who do men say that I am?*"