



The Christ Conspiracy

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A critique of Acharya S's book *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold*

Acharya S is a skeptic with an interest in mythology who has written a book entitled *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold*. This book presents an hypothesis of how Christianity came into being. Although it has received no attention from scholarship, with the lone exception of a negative book review and that from an atheist scholar,[1] *The Christ Conspiracy* has nonetheless gained support from a number of laypersons. The occasion for this paper is to assess Murdock's major claims in a brief manner in terms of their accuracy and whether her book is a worthwhile contribution on the origin of Christianity. The paper will sample some of her major claims. No attempts will be made to defend the Christian worldview.

Acharya means "guru" or "teacher." Her actual name is D. Murdock.[2] Throughout the remainder of this paper, this author will be referred to as Ms. Murdock. The thesis of *The Christ Conspiracy* is that pagans and Jews who were Masons from the first and second centuries got together and invented the account of Jesus and his disciples in order to create a religion which it was hoped would serve as a one-world religion for the Roman empire. This religion would be a collage of all of the other world religions and combined with astrology.

This, of course, is a radical and unorthodox picture of Christianity. However, being radical and unorthodox does not invalidate a view. Notwithstanding, if Ms. Murdock's picture of Christianity is to be believed as correct, she has

to be accurate in her assessment of the details of the other religions she cites in terms of their similarities with Christianity, correct in her assessment of ancient astrology, correct in her peculiar datings of the Gospels, and correct concerning the Masons. If she is incorrect on any one of these, her hypothesis must be altered or abandoned. It is when we look at the areas of astrology, comparative religion, New Testament higher criticism, Freemasonry, and other issues, we find her to be incorrect in every one of these areas.

1. Astrology

Ms. Murdock claims that as myth developed, "*it took the form of a play, with a cast of characters, including the 12 divisions of the sky called the signs or constellations of the zodiac. The symbols that typified these 12 celestial sections of 300 each were not based on what the constellations actually look like but represent aspects of earthly life. Thus, the ancient peoples were able to incorporate these earthly aspects into the mythos and project them onto the all-important celestial screen.*"[3] Based on this understanding, she claims that the mythical Jesus recognized the coming of the age of Pisces; thus, the Christian fish.[4]

Is it true that astrology played a large part in the formation of Christianity as Ms. Murdock asserts? Noel Swerdlow is Professor of Astronomy and Astrophysics at the University of Chicago. He has specialized in the study of the practice of astronomy in antiquity through the 17th century. I emailed Dr. Swerdlow on this matter. Here is what he had to say on Ms. Murdock's view:

In antiquity, constellations were just groups of stars, and there were no borders separating the region of one from the region of another. In astrology, for computational purposes the zodiacal signs were taken as twelve arcs of 30 degrees measured from the vernal equinox. Because of the slow westward motion of the equinoxes and solstices, what we call the precession of the equinoxes, these did not correspond to the constellations with the same names. But ... within which group of stars the vernal equinox was located, was of no astrological significance at all. The modern ideas about the Age of Pisces or the Age of Aquarius are based upon the location of the vernal equinox

in the regions of the stars of those constellations. But the regions, the borders between, those constellations are a completely modern convention of the International Astronomical Union for the purpose of mapping ... and never had any astrological significance. I hope this is helpful although in truth what this woman is claiming is so wacky that it is hardly worth answering.[5] So when this woman says that the Christian fish was a symbol of the 'coming age of Pisces', she is saying something that no one would have thought of in antiquity because in which constellation of the fixed stars the vernal equinox was located, was of no significance and is entirely an idea of modern, I believe twentieth-century, astrology.[6]

In other words, the ancient "Christ conspirators" could not have recognized the 12 celestial sections in order to incorporate them into a Christian myth and announce the ushering in of the Age of Pisces as Murdock claims, because the division into the celestial sections did not occur until a meeting of the International Astronomical Union in the 20th century![7] Therefore, her claim is without any merit.

Ms. Murdock also holds that when we see 12 figures in the Bible that these are representative of the 12 zodiacal signs. She writes, "*In reality, it is no accident that there are 12 patriarchs, 12 tribes of Israel and 12 disciples, 12 being the number of the astrological signs ...*"[8] If we want to accept her thoughts on this, we also need to accept that Dunkin Donuts is owned by an astrologer since they give a discount when you buy a dozen donuts. Grocery stores are also run by astrologers, since you buy eggs by the dozen. Even our legal system must have been influenced by astrology, since there are 12 jurors. When you want to see astrology in something, you see it, even when it requires that you read in foreign meanings into the texts.

But there are further problems with her thesis. Were the 12 tribes of Israel representative of the 12 signs of the zodiac as she claims?[9] She asserts that Simeon and Levi are Gemini. Judah is Leo. And the list goes on. She also claims that when Jacob set up 12 stones representing the tribes that they were really representing the 12 signs of the zodiac.[10] But this is impossible.

Genesis was written approximately 1,000 BC and contains the story of the 12 tribes of Israel which would have occurred even earlier.[11] The division into the 12 zodiacal signs did not occur until the Babylonians made the divisions in the fifth century BC.[12] Therefore, reading astrology into the twelve tribes is anachronistic.

She also claims that "*[t]he Hebrews were 'moon-worshippers,' since many of their feasts and holidays revolved around the movements and phases of the moon. Such moon-worship is found repeatedly in the Old Testament (Ps. 8:13 [sic], 104:19; Is. 66:23), and to this day Jews celebrate holidays based on the lunar calendar. At Isaiah 47, these moon-worshippers are equated with astrologers, i.e., '... those who divide the heavens, who gaze at the stars, who at the new moons predict what shall befall you.'*"[13]

Were the Hebrews moon-worshippers? This seems unlikely for a couple of reasons:

(A) Just because the Jews operated under a lunar calendar, does not mean that they were moon-worshippers.

(B) When you look at the three biblical references she provides to support her claim that moon worship is found repeatedly in the Old Testament, it is readily seen that these have been taken out of context. Let us look briefly at these. The verses before and after have also been included, in order to provide you with their context. The verses Ms. Murdock appeals to have been italicized.

From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. *When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?* (Psalm 8:2-4, New International Version (NIV))

The high mountains belong to the wild goats; the crags are a refuge for the coneys. *The moon marks off the seasons, and the sun knows when to go down.* You bring darkness, it becomes night, and all the beasts of the forest prowl. The lions roar for their prey and seek their food from God. The sun rises, and they steal away; they return and lie down in their dens. Then man goes out to his work, to his labor until evening. (Psalm 104:18-

23, NIV)

As we read these verses, we discover that they have nothing at all to do with moon worship. The third reference is from Isaiah where God is supposed to be speaking and says:

"As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares the LORD, "so will your name and descendants endure. *From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me,*" says the LORD. "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." (Isaiah 66:22-24)

These verses do not speak of moon-worship. Rather the psalmist says that as time goes on, all mankind will worship the Lord. Let us now look at the final verse Ms. Murdock appeals to in support of her thesis that the Hebrews were involved in moon-worship.

Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you. Keep on, then, with your magic spells and with your many sorceries, which you have labored at since childhood. Perhaps you will succeed, perhaps you will cause terror. *All the counsel you have received has only worn you out! Let your astrologers come forward, those stargazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you.* Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame. Here are no coals to warm anyone; here is no fire to sit by. That is all they can do for you – these you have labored with and trafficked with since childhood. Each of them goes on in his error; there is not one that can save you. (Isaiah 47:11-15, NIV)

In this passage, the moon-worshippers and astrologers are clearly not the Hebrews, but the Babylonians whom God is saying He is about to destroy! So we have seen that the passages Ms. Murdock appeals to in support of her thesis that the Hebrews were involved in moon-worship do not support her view in the least. Rather they

have been taken out of context, a practice referred to a "proof-texting." Unfortunately, average readers will not look up her references and see this for themselves.

This is not to say that there was not a single Hebrew who worshipped the moon. But her absurd interpretations indicate that she has not supported her view that the Hebrews as a nation had a practice of moon-worship. This is further confirmed by the fact that the worship of anyone or anything other than God was prohibited. Whenever this practice is mentioned in the Bible, there is correction or strong condemnation.[14] Contrary to Ms. Murdock, the Bible is not friendly towards astrology. There is not a single verse that approves of sun-worship, moon-worship or astrology.

Ms. Murdock also claims that the Bible is favorable towards divination. She writes, "*In the earliest parts of the Bible, divination is praised as a way to commune with God or divine the future (Genesis 30:27). Indeed, the word 'divination' comes from the word 'divine,' which is a demonstration that divination was originally considered godly and not evil.*"[15] This too is an incorrect understanding of the text. Genesis 30:27 records Laban telling Jacob that he has learned through divination that God has blessed him on Jacob's account. But Laban was known to worship other gods.[16] This verse does not praise divination and God has said elsewhere that divination is evil. For example in Leviticus 19:26, it is written, "*Do not practice divination or sorcery.*" Likewise, in Deuteronomy 18:10-12 it is written, "*Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.*"

She claims that the Bible teaches the signs found in the stars and quotes Genesis 1:14 in the old King James Version: "*And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years ...*" She says that this verse "*basically describes the zodiac.*"[17] However, modern translations

present a more accurate translation: "And God said, 'Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years'" (NIV). This is also how prominent Hebrew dictionaries understand it.[18]

Dr. Richard Patterson is an Old Testament scholar who has specialized in ancient Semitic languages during his career. He was involved in the translations of the New Living Translation (NLT), the Holman Christian Standard Bible, and is currently working on the revision for the New International Version. He has written close to 150 journal articles, critical reviews, and Hebrew dictionary entries. Concerning Genesis 1:14, Dr. Patterson comments, "The KJV translates this verse in a wooden sense. However, if we want to understand the original sense of the Hebrew, the NIV and NLT provide a more accurate rendering. Moreover, a look at the occurrences of this word throughout the Old Testament reveals that it is not used in the sense of astrological signs even one time outside of our verse in question." [19]

It is interesting to note that the equivalent Greek word (*SHMEION*) is never used in the sense of an astrological sign in the Septuagint, the ancient Greek translation of the Old Testament which was popular among the Hebrews and the early Christians, although it appears 123 times.[20]

Ms. Murdock says a lot more in reference to astrology and the Bible which this short paper cannot address. However, it is hoped that these few samples are adequate to demonstrate that she is terribly inaccurate in her understanding of the practice of astrology among the ancients as well as her ineptness in using the Bible to support her view.

2. Comparative Religion Studies

a. Similarities to Krishna

Ms. Murdock contends that Jesus as crucified savior was merely borrowed from other religions. For her, one of the most striking similarities is found with Krishna, the Hindu god. Indeed, her forthcoming book, *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled* expounds on this position.[21]

What about Ms. Murdock's claim that Krishna is so

similar to Jesus that Christianity must have borrowed from Hinduism? Dr. Edwin Bryant, Professor of Hinduism at Rutgers University is a scholar on Hinduism. As of the writing of this paper, he has just translated the Bhagavata-Purana (life of Krishna) for Penguin World Classics and is currently writing a book to be titled, *In Quest of Historical Krishna*.

When I informed him that Ms. Murdock wrote an article claiming that Krishna had been crucified, he replied, "That is absolute and complete nonsense. There is absolutely no mention anywhere which alludes to a crucifixion." [22] He also added that Krishna was killed by an arrow from a hunter who accidentally shot him in the heel. He died and ascended. It was not a resurrection. The sages who came there for him could not really see it.[23]

Then I read a statement by Ms. Murdock from her article "Krishna, Crucified?" an excerpt from her forthcoming book, *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled*. [24] In it she states, "it appears that Krishna is not the first Indian god depicted as crucified. Prior to him was another incarnation of Vishnu, the avatar named Wittoba or Vithoba, who has often been identified with Krishna." To this Bryant responded, "She doesn't know what she's talking about! Vithoba was a form of Krishna worshipped in the state of Maharashtra. There are absolutely no Indian gods portrayed as crucified." Then he became indignant and said, "If someone is going to go on the air and make statements about religious tradition, they should at least read a religion 101 course." [25]

Later I emailed him regarding her 24 comparisons of Krishna to Jesus which the reader may find in *The Christ Conspiracy*. [26] He stated that 14 of her 24 comparisons are wrong and a 15th is partially wrong. [27] What about her 9 that are correct: especially Krishna's virgin birth, the story of the tyrant who had thousands of infants killed (a parallel to Herod), and Krishna's bodily ascension? Benjamin Walker in his book, *The Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism* provides an answer. After tracing similarities related to the birth, childhood, and divinity of Jesus, as well as the late dating of these legendary developments in India, "[t]here can be no doubt that the Hindus borrowed the

tales [from Christianity], but not the name." [28] Bryant also comments that these parallels come from the Bhagavata Purana and the Harivamsa. Bryant believes the former "to be prior to the 7th century AD (although many scholars have hitherto considered it to be 11th century AD)." [29] Yet this is hundreds of years after the Gospel accounts. Of the Harivamsa, Bryant is uncertain concerning its date. However, most sources seem to place its composition between the fourth and sixth centuries, again hundreds of years after the Gospel accounts had been in circulation. [30] An earlier date is entertained by David Mason of the University of Wisconsin, who states that there is no consensus on the dating that he is aware of but that it may be as early as the second century. [31] Even if this early date is accurate, it is still after the Gospels, not before as Murdock's thesis requires.

Ms. Murdock further claims that Christianity has failed in India because "the Brahmins have recognized Christianity as a relatively recent imitation of their much older traditions." [32] To this, Dr. Bryant simply commented, "Stupid comment." [33]

Ms. Murdock's claim that Christianity has borrowed substantially from Hinduism is without merit. Her claims are false, unsupported, and exhibit a lack of understanding of the Hindu faith.

b. Similarities to Buddha

In addition to Krishna, Ms. Murdock cites similarities between the Buddha and Jesus as an example of how Christianity has borrowed from Buddhism. As with Krishna, she lists 18 similarities Jesus shares with Buddha in *The Christ Conspiracy*. [34] Regarding these, I emailed Professor Chun-fang Yu, Chair of the Department of Religion at Rutgers. Dr. Yu has specialized in Buddhist studies. I listed the 18 similarities recorded by Ms. Murdock and asked if these were actual traditions of the Buddha. She replied writing, "None of the 18 [are] correct. A few, however, have some semblance of correctness but are badly distorted." She then listed a total of eight that had some similarities and provided details. [35]

Dr. Yu ended by writing, "[The woman you speak of] is totally ignorant of Buddhism. It is very dangerous to spread misinformation like this. You

should not honor [Ms. Murdock] by engaging in a discussion. Please ask [her] to take a basic course in world religion or Buddhism before uttering another word about things she does not know."

It is appropriate to mention here that Ms. Murdock claims to have mastered several religions. Her book, *The Christ Conspiracy* claims a mastery of Christianity and her new book, *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled*, with excerpts found on her web site also indicate that she believes Hinduism and Buddhism to be two other religions which she has mastered in terms of her knowledge of them. However, as we have seen, she is terribly ignorant of the actual traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism. And as we are about to see, she is likewise mistaken when it comes to her understanding of Christianity.

3. Christianity

We saw in section one ("Astrology") that Ms. Murdock does not use biblical texts in an accurate manner to support her views. In this section we will notice that she also possesses some peculiar views when it comes to New Testament higher criticism. Can these views be supported?

a. Very Late Datings of the Gospels

Ms. Murdock holds that the Gospels were not penned until after AD 150, a view held by no major New Testament scholar, irrespective of their theological perspective. She supports her position by quoting John Remsburg who wrote: "The Four Gospels were unknown to the early Christian Fathers. Justin Martyr, the most eminent of the early Fathers, wrote about the middle of the second century. His writings in proof of the divinity of Christ demanded the use of these Gospels, had they existed in his time. He makes more than 300 quotations from the books of the Old Testament, and nearly one hundred from the Apocryphal books of the New Testament; but none from the four Gospels." [36]

But this is false. In Justin's *First Apology* [i.e., First Defense], he writes, "For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, 'This do in remembrance of Me, this is My body;' and that,

after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks, He said, 'This is My blood;' and gave it to them alone." [37] So Justin calls the Gospels the "memoirs" of the apostles and then quotes from them. [38] In his *Dialogue With Trypho*, Justin makes mention of the "memoirs" another 13 times. [39] In every instance he either quotes from a Gospel or relates a story from them.

Why is it that Justin does not cite the Gospels when defending the deity of Christ? He is dialoguing with a Jew and wants to use the Old Testament Scriptures to defend his position, since he shares these in common with Trypho. This was also the practice of Paul: "Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul's custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures ..." [40]

As further support she cites Charles Waite: "At the very threshold of the subject, we are met by the fact, that nowhere in all the writings of Justin, does he once so much as mention any of these gospels. Nor does he mention either of their supposed authors, except John." [41] It is true that Justin never says who wrote them. However, contrary to Murdock's sources, we know that they existed because Justin referred to them and quoted them as just demonstrated above. Ms. Murdock could claim that the Gospels Justin referred to were different than the four we now have. But if this is the case, what data can she provide to support her view? She must also adequately explain why there is a complete absence of manuscripts for these while we have an abundant number of manuscripts for the four Gospels we now have. Moreover, the Gospels Justin appeals to seem to have precisely the same content as the four we now have. So she will have difficulty demonstrating that multiple layers of legend were added from Justin's time until the latter part of the second century, since the early sources with which Justin was familiar and from which the four gospels supposedly borrowed said precisely the same things!

She quotes Waite again: "No one of the four gospels is mentioned in any other part of the New Testament..." [42] He goes on to say that there is no other evidence of a Gospel until the latter part of the second century. But this is false as well.

Paul appears to quote from Luke's Gospel (1 Timothy 5:18; cf. Luke 10:7). The oldest manuscript we have is a fragment from the Gospel of John and dates to around AD 125 (labeled p52 and kept at the John Rylands Library in Manchester, England). The early Church father, Ignatius (c. AD 110), who either knew the apostles or was close to those who did, seems very familiar with the Gospel of Matthew, because of the numerous parallels and apparent quotations from Matthew. Clement (c. AD 95) and Polycarp (c. AD 110), who knew the apostles, also make use of Matthew. 2 Clement (c. AD 120-140) employs numerous sayings from Matthew, Luke and a few from Mark. The author of the Shepherd of Hermas (c. AD 90-150) almost certainly knew some or all of the four gospels. All of these early Christian writers were from the latter part of the first century through no later than the middle part of the second century. [43] Therefore, her claim that the Gospels were not composed until the latter part of the second century is without support. And there are no respected New Testament critical scholars who embrace her datings.

Murdock quotes from *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*: "No extant manuscript can be dated earlier than the 4th century AD." [44] This shows no knowledge of the manuscripts that we have. The p52 papyrus mentioned a moment ago dates to around 125. p75 dates to between 175-225. p46 and p66 are slightly earlier and both date to around 200. p45, the first of the Chester Beatty Biblical papyri dates to the first half of the third century. p47 dates to the latter part of the third century. p72 dates to the third century. [45] In summary, we have seven manuscripts, which predate the fourth century.

b. Marcion's Gospel came first?

In the middle part of the second century, there was a fellow named Marcion, who was considered by many in the early Church as a heretic. His view was that the God of the Jews was evil and that Jesus was a good God who came along to save the world from this evil God. During His crucifixion, Jesus merely appeared to have suffered. But He really did not according to Marcion, since he did not believe that Jesus as God could suffer. Marcion is the first person known to have made a list of the Christian books and letters which he believed were inspired. He

did this between AD 180-200. Because of his beliefs, he rejected all of the Gospels except Luke which he in turn changed substantially to fit his beliefs. He also accepted ten of Paul's letters. Amazingly, Ms. Murdock says that Marcion's Gospel preceded Luke's, a view no serious scholar takes. Why does she think this? Because Luke said that he was writing to Theophilus in Luke 1:3 and that Theophilus was the bishop of Antioch from AD 169-177.[46] But this is absurd. Why are we to believe that this is the same Theophilus? If she is going to use verse 3 of the first chapter of Luke to establish that Luke was writing to Theophilus, would it not be wise to also read verse 2 where Luke says that he received his information from the "eyewitnesses" of Jesus and "ministers of the word"? This "buffet line" approach to biblical texts where she takes what she wants and simply ignores what is not convenient is an extreme case of hermeneutical gymnastics.

She also thinks that the Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark was an associate of Marcion. Where does she get this? She quotes a passage from Eusebius who mentions a Mark who was associated with Marcion.[47] However, Eusebius never says or even implies that this was the Mark who wrote the Gospel of Mark and Mark was a common name. There is no reason at all to believe that these are the same Marks.

c. Paul's Letters

She believes that all of Paul's letters are forgeries. In support of this position she quotes Joseph Wheless: "*The entire 'Pauline group' is the same forged class ... says E. B. [Encyclopedia Biblica] ... 'With respect to the canonical Pauline Epistles, ... there are none of them by Paul; neither fourteen, nor thirteen, nor nine or eight, nor yet even the four so long "universally" regarded as unassailable. They are all, without distinction, pseudographia (false-writings, forgeries)...'*"[48] She also quotes Hayyim ben Yehoshua who writes, "*we are left with the conclusion that all the Pauline epistles are pseudepigraphic*" and he also refers to Paul as a "*semi-mythical*" figure.[49] Again, this is a position that no major scholar takes.

Polycarp (c. AD 110), who knew the apostles, quotes 1 Corinthians 6:2 and assigns it as the words of Paul (Polycarp to the Philippians 11:2).

Three of the earliest apostolic fathers, two of whom probably knew the apostles, mention Paul in their writings (Clement of Rome, Polycarp, Ignatius). They mention several things about Paul including his sufferings and martyrdom,[50] his position as an apostle,[51] and that he "*accurately and reliably taught the word.*"[52] Moreover, the apostolic fathers cite several of Paul's letters: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy. Therefore, there are good reasons to believe that Paul was an historical person who authored several letters, which are contained in the New Testament. No serious scholar takes the position of Ms. Murdock and there are good reasons why.

d. Genre

Appealing to Origen as the "*most accomplished biblical scholar of the early church,*" Ms. Murdock quotes him as saying, "*The Scriptures were of little use to those who understood them literally, as they are written.*"[53] When we look at her endnote referencing Origen, we find that her source is Godfrey Higgins, not a biblical scholar or an historian, but an attorney who is claiming Origen said it. When we then do a search through all of Origen's writings, we find that he never made that statement. In fact, Origen says precisely just the opposite. Throughout his writings, Origen does show how certain parts of the Bible should be interpreted metaphorically, such as "*the hand of God*" or God's "*anger.*" However, in *De Principiis*, he says the following: "*Let no one, however, entertain the suspicion that we do not believe any history in Scripture to be real, because we suspect certain events related in it not to have taken place.... For the passages that are true in their historical meaning are much more numerous than those which are interspersed with a purely spiritual signification.*"[54] Again, this shows that Ms. Murdock is not personally familiar with Origen's works. She never interacts with him directly in *The Christ Conspiracy*. Instead, she only quotes others who end up being wrong.[55]

e. All the Variants

She says that there are about 150,000 variants in the manuscripts of the New Testament.[56] This is quite a distortion of the truth. There are basically three different manuscript traditions when it comes to the New Testament: Alexandrine, Cesarean, and Byzantine. While the

Alexandrine and Cesarean are the oldest and considered the most reliable, the Byzantine is the latest and has the majority of manuscripts. Let us say that the spelling of a single word in one verse in the Byzantine differs from the spelling of that word in the same spot in the Alexandrine and Cesarean. Radical critics count all of the Byzantine manuscripts as a variant. So for example, if there are 4,000 Byzantine manuscripts, by her count there are 4,000 variants. If there is a difference in the word order in a specific verse in the Byzantine, that adds another 4,000 variants, although the words are the same; only their order in Greek differs. So, from only 1 difference in spelling and 1 variance in word order, we have 8,000 variants by her count, instead of just two! You begin to see that her way of counting presents a distorted picture of the way things actually are.

How accurate is the text we have today? When scholars incorporate the principles of textual criticism, they can reproduce a text of the New Testament that is better than 95% pure to what the originals said. A more conservative estimate comes from Princeton New Testament scholar, Bruce Metzger who writes that by far the greatest proportion of the text is virtually certain.[57] It is important to also note that any unresolved differences do not change a single doctrine of the Christian faith.

f. Careless Readings

Many of her claims reflect a careless reading of the text. For example, she cites Eusebius concerning Dionysius' claims that others were adding and taking from his writings and says that this is proof that the Gospels were being tampered with![58] In another example, she states, "*In Acts we read that the first 'Christians' are found at Antioch, even though there was no canonical Gospel there until after 200 CE.*"[59] However, this too is false. In Acts 11:26, we read, "*The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch*" [emphasis mine]; not that the "*first 'Christians' were found at Antioch*" as Murdock asserts.[60] Moreover, her claim here that no canonical Gospel was in Antioch until after AD 200 is likewise false. The apostolic father, Ignatius, was the bishop of Antioch and wrote around AD 110 and shows a strong familiarity with Matthew's Gospel. As Clayton Jefford, a biblical scholar who has specialized in studies on

the apostolic fathers, writes, "*Because of the presence of numerous parallels and apparent quotations from Matthew in Ignatius's writings, it seems evident that Ignatius knew, and probably used, that gospel. An especially important consideration is the way in which he has used the gospel. The bishop did not tend to use quotations from his source text, but rather made allusions to Matthean episodes and concepts. These became the point of contact for his own arguments throughout the letters.*"[61] In other words, Ignatius' familiarity with Matthew's Gospel is evident in his use of material unique to Matthew and, therefore, not found in the other Gospels. One can see this in the following writings of Ignatius: To the Ephesians (14:2, cf. Matthew 12:33; 17:1, cf. Matthew 26:6-13), To the Trallians (11:1, cf. Matthew 15:13), To the Philadelphians (3:1, cf. Matthew 15:13), To the Smyrnaeans (1:1, cf. Matthew 3:15; 6:1, cf. Matthew 19:12), To Polycarp (2:2, cf. Matthew 10:16).

g. The Myth of Massive Martyrdom

Ms. Murdock claims that Christians were never martyred by the masses. She labels it a "*myth*" that "*the early Christians were gentle 'lambs' served up in large numbers as 'martyrs for the faith' by the diabolical Romans.*"[62] Moreover, she claims that the accounts of massive martyrdom were the inventions of Christians in the 9th century.[63]

One of the main passages which support the position that many Christians died at the hands of the Romans is found in the writings of the Roman historian, Tacitus (AD 55-120).[64] However, Murdock states that this passage is a forgery. Why? She argues that Tacitus "*was born two decades after 'the Savior's' alleged death; thus, if there were any passages in his work referring to Christ or his immediate followers, they would be secondhand and long after the alleged events.*"[65] As discussed below with Josephus, this is a naïve view of how historical studies are conducted. If you have to be an eyewitness in order to give an accurate account of history, then no one could write a text today providing a history of the American Civil War and, indeed, much of what we know historically would have to be discarded.

She claims that the "*passage is an interpolation and forgery*" because no one quotes it prior to the

15th century. Perhaps no one cited this passage because there were no occasions when it would have been helpful. The overwhelming majority of scholars consider this passage to be authentic, since it is not laudatory of Christians.[66] Ms. Murdock wants it both ways. She rejects the Josephus' Antiquities 18:3 passage because it is so friendly towards Christ. However, she rejects Tacitus, even though he is hostile towards Christ. It seems that there is nothing that would convince her. Since there is no evidence of interpolation or forgery in this passage, Ms. Murdock's position is entirely without merit. So, Tacitus' writings stand as a testimony that Christians were being killed for their faith.

Pliny, the Roman governor of Bithynia (c. AD 61-113) likewise writes of his actions against Christians. He interrogated Christians, asking if they were believers. If they answered, "yes," he asked them two more times, threatening to kill them if they refused to recant. If they continued their confession, he had them executed.[67] Of Pliny, Murdock states, "*One of the pitifully few 'references' held up by Christians as evidence of Jesus's existence is the letter to Trajan supposedly written by the Roman historian Pliny the Younger. However, in this letter there is but one word that is applicable, 'Christians,' and that has been demonstrated to be spurious, as is also suspected of the entire 'document.'*"[68]

Are Letter 96 of Pliny and the Emperor Trajan's response forgeries, as Murdock suggests? Murdock provides no reasons to believe this. New Testament scholar, Robert Van Voorst says no.[69] The text of these letters is well-attested in the manuscripts and their authenticity is not disputed seriously by scholars. They were also known by the time of Tertullian (AD 196-212). The prominent Oxford historian A.N. Sherwin-White, who is not a Christian, has disposed of the few suggestions that never gained credence which claim that the letters were part or wholesale forgeries.

Is there any evidence that Christians of the first and second centuries were dying for being Christians? Following are some references in addition to Tacitus and Pliny, which support the position that people were killed for being Christians:

1. Shepherd of Hermas (Parable 9, section 28 [or ch 105]; Vision 3, section 1, verse 9-2:1 [or ch 9:9-10:1]; 5:2 [or ch 13:2])
2. Melito of Sardis (cited by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 4:26:3)
3. Dionysius of Corinth (cited by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, 2:25:8)
4. Hegesippus (cited by Eusebius, 3:32:3; 2:23:18; 4:22:4)
5. Eusebius (Ecclesiastical History, 5:2:2-3; 1:26, 48; 2:25)
6. Polycrates of Ephesus (Bishop of Ephesus) in his letter to Victor of Rome
7. Josephus (Antiquities 20:200)
8. Stephen (Acts 7:59-60)
9. James (Acts 12:2)
10. Antipas (Revelation 2:13)

Although the mass killing of Christians had not yet begun when the apostle Paul penned his letters, he writes of how Christians were suffering in his day for being Christians. To the Philippian church he wrote (c. AD 61), "*To you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake*" (Philippians 1:29ff). Christians were suffering for their faith by the middle of the first century.

Around the year 200, Tertullian mentioned Rome's brutality towards Christians including numerous executions by the Romans in his day. He wrote to the rulers of the Roman Empire saying, "*The more often we are mown down by you, the more in number we grow; the blood of Christians is seed.*"[70]

Ms. Murdock appeals to Origen's statement in Contra Celsus 3:8 where he writes that the Christians who were killed "*can be easily numbered.*" However, Origen's statement may also be interpreted to refer to the more prominent examples ("*on special occasions*"). These would be people like Polycarp, Ignatius, and others. It is important to remember that Murdock's possible interpretation of one statement in Origen does not nullify the multiply attested and certain accounts of many.

4. Non-biblical Sources who mention Jesus

According to Murdock, "*There are basically no non-biblical references to a historical Jesus by any known historian of the time during and after*

Jesus' purported advent."[71] Most historians of antiquity disagree with this claim, acknowledging a number of non-biblical sources, Christian and non-Christian alike, who mention Jesus in their writings. Let's look at two non-Christian sources on whom Murdock comments.

a. Josephus

"[I]n the entire works of the [sic] Josephus, which constitute many volumes of great detail encompassing centuries of history, there is no mention of Paul or the Christians, and there are only two brief paragraphs that purport to refer to Jesus. Although much has been made of these 'references,' they have been dismissed by scholars and Christian apologists alike as forgeries, as have been those referring to John the Baptist and James, 'brother of Jesus.'"[72] This is a big statement by Ms. Murdock who does not provide any reasons as to why these passages should be rejected.

Murdock's claim is grossly naïve as well as false. Josephus' passage on John the Baptist[73] is regarded as authentic and is hardly disputed by scholars. Edwin Yamauchi, Professor of History at Miami University writes, "No scholar has questioned the authenticity of this passage, though there are some differences between Josephus's account and that in the Gospels..."[74] New Testament scholar, Robert Van Voorst of Western Theological Seminary likewise comments that the passage by Josephus on John the Baptist is "held to be undoubtedly genuine by most interpreters"[75] and that "scholars also hold [it] to be independent of the New Testament." [76] John Meier, Professor of New Testament at The Catholic University of America writes that Josephus' mentioning of John the Baptist is "accepted as authentic by almost all scholars" and that it "is simply inconceivable as the work of a Christian of any period." [77] Jewish scholar, Louis Feldman of Yeshiva University and perhaps the most prominent expert on Josephus, comments on this passage: "There can be little doubt as to the genuineness of Josephus' passage about John the Baptist." [78] Therefore, Murdock's comment that this passage has "been dismissed by scholars and Christian apologists alike as forgeries" is demonstrably false.

The reasons for accepting the authenticity of this passage are:

- (a) The style and vocabulary belong to Josephus.
- (b) If a subsequent Christian editor added the passage, we would expect a comment about John's preaching regarding the Messiah who was Jesus.
- (c) An interpolator would most likely not have included the discrepancy between the Gospels and Josephus in terms of the reason John was executed.

What about Josephus' comments on James, the brother of Jesus in a separate passage?[79] Is this the work of an ancient Christian editor who added them? Have these likewise "been dismissed by scholars and Christian apologists alike as forgeries" as Murdock claims?

Among the reasons for accepting the passage as authentic by Josephus are:

- (a) a Christian editor would have used complimentary language to describe James and more laudatory language referring to Jesus.[80]
- (b) The main point Josephus is attempting to make is that Ananus was deposed because of his illegal executions of several that included James. However, James is mentioned simply in passing.
- (c) Josephus' account differs from other Christian accounts of the death of James.

Feldman writes, "The passage about James [Antiquities Book 20, Sections 197-200] has generally been accepted as authentic." [81] Elsewhere he mentions this text, "the authenticity of which has been almost universally acknowledged." [82] Another Jewish scholar, Zvi Baras, states that this passage "is considered authentic by most scholars." [83] Yamauchi comments, "Few scholars have questioned the genuineness of this passage." [84] Van Voorst writes, "The overwhelming majority of scholars holds that the words 'the brother of Jesus called Christ' are authentic, as is the entire passage in which it is found." [85] Again, Murdock's claim is false and reveals that she is either unfamiliar with scholarship on the subject or simply ignores it, since it fails to support her peculiar views.

Only one passage about Jesus in Josephus is disputed seriously by scholars. This passage is found in Book 18, Section 3 of Antiquities and is often referred to as the *Testimonium Flavianum*.

A lot has been written on this passage within scholarship. In his book, *Josephus and Modern Scholarship, 1937-1980*, Feldman lists 87 scholarly discussions on this passage during that time period.[86] This passage typically reads as follows:

Now, there was about this time Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works — a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. He was [the] Christ; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day.

Most scholars reject a wholesale acceptance of this passage. Origen was an early Church father and indicated that Josephus was not a Christian.[87] Therefore, it would be odd that a non-Christian Jew would make statements like Jesus was "a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man", "He was the Christ", and "he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him."

While debate continues on this fascinating passage, most scholars believe that a majority of the passage is Josephus, because (a) the term, "wise man" is typical for Josephus and less than we would expect from a Christian editor,[88] (b) the style belongs to Josephus,[89] (c) the Greek word for tribe is not a typical Christian expression.[90] Many scholars today accept that this passage was included originally by Josephus with the exceptions of the three additions that appear to be the result of a subsequent Christian editor sometime during the second and early fourth centuries. Van Voorst writes, "*In sum, Josephus has given us in two passages something unique among all ancient non-Christian witnesses to Jesus: a carefully neutral, highly accurate and perhaps independent witness to Jesus, a wise man whom his persistent followers called 'the Christ.'*"[91] Yamauchi comments, "Josephus knew that Jesus was the

brother of James, the martyred leader of the church in Jerusalem, and that he was a wise teacher who had established a wide and lasting following, despite the fact that he had been crucified under Pilate at the instigation of some of the Jewish leaders."[92] Feldman comments, "I believe that the Josephus passage about Jesus was partly interpolated by Christians. I agree with John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1991) 60-61 that three passages have been interpolated: if indeed one should call him a man; he was the Messiah; and for he appeared to them on the third day, living again, just as the divine prophets had spoken of these and countless other wondrous things about him."[93] Zvi Baras writes that the "more plausible" position is "accepting parts of the passage and rejecting others." [94] Morton Smith, Professor Emeritus of Ancient History at Columbia University, concludes that Josephus certainly mentions Jesus in this passage but is pessimistic that the original can be reconstructed.[95]

In conclusion, the majority of scholars accept that Josephus certainly mentions Jesus on two occasions and that his account of John the Baptist is authentic. As Van Voorst writes, "[Josephus'] implicit affirmation of the existence of Jesus has been, and still is, the most significant obstacle for those who argue that extra-biblical evidence is not [proving] on this point." Thus again, Ms. Murdock has made a claim which anyone doing legitimate research on the subject would know to be false.

b. Tacitus

Ms. Murdock asserts that Tacitus cannot be regarded as a source who confirms the existence of Jesus. Why? Tacitus wasn't born until about 25 years after Jesus and so all of his information is second hand.[96] This type of thinking though is medieval. It is literally how people in the Middle Ages did historical studies, when only an eyewitness counted! If we conducted historical inquiry that way today, we could know very little about history.

For example, most of what we know about Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus comes from the ancient Roman historians, Tacitus and Suetonius. However, Tacitus and Suetonius are even more removed from Julius and Augustus than they

were from Jesus. So if we listened to Ms. Murdock, no one could know anything about these two most famous Roman Caesars. In fact, no one today could write a history of the American Civil War, since it would by no means be first hand knowledge. But we can write an accurate history of the Civil War, since there are letters, documents, and the written testimonies of those who were there. Tacitus and Suetonius were a lot closer to the events they write about than we are to the American Civil War.

John Meier is a non-evangelical critical scholar. In his book, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking The Historical Jesus*, Meier states, "*despite some feeble attempts to show that this text is a Christian interpolation in Tacitus, the passage is obviously genuine. Not only is it witnessed in all the manuscripts of the Annals, the very anti-Christian tone of the text makes Christian origin almost impossible.*"[97] Similarly, in his book, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, Robert Van Voorst writes that only a few words in the text are generally disputed, such as Tacitus' spelling of the word "*Crestians*" instead of "*Christians*," and his naming Pilate as "*procurator*" instead of the more accurate "*prefect*." He writes that on the basis of these a few have claimed that the entire passage is the result of a subsequent Christian editor, but calls this "*pure speculation.*"[98] The differences are easily reconciled. Moreover, the style of the text definitely belongs to Tacitus. Pagan editors did not express themselves in the Latin that Tacitus uses[99] and a Christian editor would not have had Tacitus call Christianity a "*deadly superstition.*" Besides all of this, the passage fits well in the context. Tacitus was a Roman Governor and could have had knowledge of past events concerning the Roman Empire. Therefore, there is no reason to doubt that Tacitus mentions Jesus as an historical person and His crucifixion by Pilate as an historical event.

c. Why was Jesus seemingly overlooked by many secular writers?

Murdock writes, "*If we were to take away all the miraculous events surrounding the story of Jesus to reveal a human, we would certainly find no one who could have garnered huge crowds around him because of his preaching. And the fact is that this crowd-drawing preacher finds his place in 'history' only in the New Testament, completely overlooked by the dozens of historians of his day,*

an era considered one of the best documented in history."[100]

The siege and overthrow of the Jewish zealots at Masada is attested alone by Josephus and archaeology. However, it is not mentioned by a single existing Roman historian. In fact, it is not even mentioned in Jewish writings like the Talmud. Ancient writers sometimes chose to omit big events. And perhaps Jesus was mentioned in other records that have since been lost.

I challenge Ms. Murdock to name someone other than Jesus who lived in the first century (e.g., Augustus, Tiberius, Nero, etc.), who is mentioned by 17 writers who do not share his convictions, and who write within 150 years of his life. No first century person was as well attested as Jesus.

d. Was Jesus' message new?

Was Jesus' message of salvation borrowed from earlier religions? In his book, *The World Religions*, J.N.D. Anderson lists some offshoots where a religious sect embraces a few of the same thoughts presented in Christianity.[101] However, for the most part, Christianity is unique in its major areas:

1. Salvation by Grace (unmerited favor of God)
2. Atonement (God paid the price for us)
3. Jesus is the only founder of a major world religion about whom deity is claimed in the first generation afterwards.
4. Resurrection. Pagan claims to a resurrection rarely concern historical persons, and they are without any evidence. In fact, Christian philosopher / historian Gary Habermas, who has specialized in resurrection studies, states in an article entitled "Resurrection Claims in Non-Christian Religions", that there is not a single clear parallel account of a dying and rising god which precedes Christianity and that the first does not appear until a minimum of 100 years after Jesus.[102] As Professor Edwin Yamauchi of Miami University who has specialized in ancient religions writes, "*... we find that early accounts attribute miracles only to Jesus.*"[103] Murdock mentions the resurrections of Buddha, Krishna, and Osiris. We have seen that the experts in Buddhism and Hinduism say that this is absolute nonsense and reflects no knowledge of these two religions, contrary to her claims to be an expert in them. Regarding Osiris, it is not a clear parallel

account at all. The story is that Osirus was killed by his brother who chopped him into 14 pieces and scattered him throughout Egypt. The Egyptian goddess, Isis, began collecting the parts and assembling them back together. Unfortunately, she was only able to find 13 of the 14 pieces. And she never brought him back to life on earth, but gave him position as god of the mummies or of the netherworld. So the picture we get of Osirus is of this guy who doesn't have all of his parts and who maintains a shadowy existence as god of the dead. As my friend Chris Clayton puts it, Osirus' coming back to life wasn't a resurrection, but a zombification!

5. Masonry

Jack Harris is an expert on Freemasonry. Before becoming a Christian in the 1970s, he went through the ranks of York Rite Masonry, the alleged "Christian" branch, and became a worshipful master. He also has a degree in Biblical Studies. These show that Mr. Harris is well acquainted with Masonic views and interpretations as well as the Bible. I asked Mr. Harris about the statements Ms. Murdock made regarding Freemasonry. Below are six comments from Murdock regarding Freemasonry. Harris responded to the first four. These are in parenthesis.

1. The four canonical gospels represent the "*four corners of the world.*" *In reality, this comment is Masonic, and these texts represent the four books of magic of the Egyptian Ritual ...*"[104] (False)
2. The book of Job, "*is a complete description of the Masonic ceremonies or Egyptian Masonry, or trial of the dead by Osiris ...*"[105] (False)
3. Peter "*the Rock*" and his keys are Masonic symbols.[106] (False)
4. "[T]he '*carpenter*' label ... is a Masonic designation, reflecting the sun's role as the great builder."[107] (False)
5. "*As Nazarenes, Jesus and Paul were Masons as well.*" This is quite an interesting comment, since Murdock believes Jesus and Paul to be mythical figures! In addition, Paul was from Tarsus, not Nazareth.

6. "*The historian Josephus certainly knew of the Masons and allegedly was one ...*"[108]

Mr. Harris stated that every one of her assertions regarding Freemasonry are wrong. Moreover, he stated that Masonry began, as we know it, in AD 1717.[109] So it is impossible that these alleged conspirators in antiquity who allegedly made up the Christian story were Masons! So much for Josephus taking the oaths of the third degree![110]

Furthermore, if the writers of the New Testament were Masons, why did they include teachings that go against Freemasonry such as that Christianity is the only way to heaven and that one should not take oaths? Freemasonry is filled with oaths and teaches the doctrine of universalism, that there are many ways to God. Ms. Murdock seems to want to see astrology in everything and a Mason hiding behind every corner throughout history.

6. Poor Scholarship

On the home page of her web site, Ms. Murdock claims to be a scholar.[111] If anything has become apparent while we have briefly examined her book, *The Christ Conspiracy*, it is that precisely the opposite is true.

In addition to all that we have just reviewed, a few other points stand out. Practically all of her sources are secondary rather than primary sources. For example, she quotes Adolf Hitler as saying that it was his Christian convictions which led him to attempt to exterminate the Jews.[112] Where did Hitler say this? We cannot know from reading her book, because her source is *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets!* On another occasion, she appeals to the *Catholic Encyclopedia*. [113] However, rather than quote directly from it, she merely quotes someone else who is summarizing from it. On still another point, she quotes Otto Schmiedel.[114] However, when you look at the endnote, you find that her source is Rudolf Steiner, a mystic.[115] This shows that Ms. Murdock knows what some others are saying. But it does nothing to prove that what her sources are saying are correct. Rarely are reasons provided by her sources in support of their statements. It is like someone arguing that terrorism is justified and cites ten terrorists claiming that terrorism is just. However, this does

nothing to support their position that terrorism is justified; only that some believe that it is. It also indicates that she has not checked out the claims of her sources, but rather uncritically accepts what they say.[116]

Much of her book is blocks of quotes from these secondary sources, most of whom are hardly authorities. Let us look at whom she cites: Barbara Walker's *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets!*; J.M. Roberts, Esq. (not a scholar but an attorney) who wrote *Antiquity Unveiled for Health Research*; Col. James Churchward's *The Lost Continent of Mu*. An uncomfortably large number of her citations are by non-scholarly sources such as these.

She makes a large number of unrestrained claims without supporting them. Here are a few examples: (a) The story of Lazarus' rising from the dead is an Egyptian myth.[117] (b) The author of Acts used Josephus and Aristides as sources.[118] (c) The book of Acts "was fabricated by monks, 'devil-drivers' and popes, who wished to form an alliance by writing the book." [119]

She draws conclusions based on certain obscure definitions of English words rather than their original meanings in Greek. For example, she says "*the Gospel was not designed to be rational, as the true meaning of the word 'gospel' is 'God's Spell,' as in magic, hypnosis and delusion.*" [120] This is laughable. The word "Gospel" has an Anglo-Saxon origin where the term "spell" means "news," not magic.[121] Moreover, it does not matter what the English word means. What matters is what the word means in Greek, something Murdock does not even bother to consider. The Greek word for "Gospel" is "euangelion." It comes from 2 words: eu which means "good" and angelos which means "angel" or "messenger." Euangelos means good messenger and our word, euangelion, means the "good message." [122] Thus, you can see why English translators have used the term "Gospel" for "good news." This is a very odd mistake by someone who claims to be a scholar of the Greek language. Again, we notice a lack of responsible research on Ms. Murdock's part.

Are scholars saying anything about *The Christ Conspiracy*? With the lone exception of a book

review which was negative towards *The Christ Conspiracy*, there has been a silence from scholarship regarding it. It seems painfully obvious why this is the situation. Her book offers no credible information towards supporting her thesis.

Dr. Robert Price is far from being a Christian. Rather, he is a prominent atheist and a member of the Jesus Seminar who reviewed Ms. Murdock's book. After referring to it as "sophomoric," Price comments, "*She is quick to state as bald fact what turn out to be, once one chases down her sources, either wild speculation or complex inference from a chain of complicated data open to many interpretations. One of the most intriguing claims made repeatedly in these books is that among the mythical predecessors of Jesus as a crucified god were the Buddha, the blue-skinned Krishna, and Dionysus. Is there any basis to these claims, which Murdock just drops like a ton of bricks? Again, she does not explain where they come from, much less why no available book on Buddha, Krishna, or Dionysus contains a crucifixion account... When Murdock speaks of the 'Christ Conspiracy,' she means it. She really believes that 'people got together and cooked up' early Christianity like a network sitcom. And who were these conspirators? The, er, Masons (pp. 334 ff.). It is remarkable how and where some people's historical skepticism comes crashing to a halt. But it gets much, much weirder than that. We start, in the last chapters, reading bits and pieces drawn from James Churchward, promoter of the imaginary lost continent of Mu; Charles Berlitz, apologist for sunken Atlantis; Zechariah Sitchin, advocate of flying saucers in ancient Akkadia; and of course all that stuff about the maps of the ancient sea kings. The Christ Conspiracy is a random bag of (mainly recycled) eccentricities, some few of them worth considering, most dangerously shaky, many outright looney.*" [123]

7. Conclusion

Ms. Murdock claims that the reason she and her sources are ignored by scholars is because her "*arguments have been too intelligent and knifelike to do away with*" and have "*no doubt [been] fearfully suppressed because they are somewhat irrefutable.*" [124] Murdock would have us all believe that prominent scholars within New

Testament criticism, Hinduism, Buddhism, astronomy, history, and Freemasonry are all intellectual lightweights compared to herself, who either cannot appreciate her arguments or suppress them for reasons untold.

However, it is abundantly clear why scholars have ignored and turned their noses up at her views. The reason for the lack any positive acknowledgment from scholars is:

- a. Almost all of her sources are secondary and are themselves wrong on many occasions.
- b. A large number of her sources are not scholars.
- c. She makes wild claims without supporting them.
- d. Her claim that astrology permeates the Bible such as that the 12 tribes of Israel and the 12 disciples represent the 12 signs of the zodiac is so erroneous that a Professor of Astronomy and Astrophysics at the University of Chicago who specializes in ancient practices in astronomy referred to her as "nutty."
- e. Her claim that Krishna represents a dying and rising god prior to Christianity is so mistaken that the Professor of Hindu Studies at Rutgers said that this claim is "absolute and complete nonsense," that "she doesn't know what she's talking about," and that she should take a religion 101 course before making these kind of claims.
- f. Her claim that many similarities exist between Buddha and Jesus elicited a similar response from the Chair of the Department of Religion at Rutgers who specializes in Buddhism: "[The woman you speak of] is totally ignorant of Buddhism. It is very dangerous to spread misinformation like this.... Please ask [her] to take a basic course in world religion or Buddhism before uttering another word about things she does not know."
- g. Indeed, even an atheist scholar, Bob Price called her book "sophomoric." He also commented that her book is "a random bag of (mainly recycled) eccentricities, some few of them worth considering, most dangerously shaky, many outright looney."

One thing you have to grant Ms. Murdock; she is consistent.[125] If you enjoy extreme and unsubstantiated views with an attitude, you will like *The Christ Conspiracy*. If you appreciate anything you can get your hands on that insults Christianity, irrespective of the quality of the arguments and the data, you will relish *The Christ*

Conspiracy. But in terms of this book being a responsible account of the origin of Christianity, it is unsalvageable.

References:

- [1] See the review by Robert M. Price, "Aquarian Skeptic" in *Free Inquiry*, Vol.21, No.3 (Amherst: The Council for Secular Humanism, 2001), pp. 66-67. For Dr. Price's comments, see sections 6, "Poor Scholarship," of this paper.
- [2] *Ibid.*, p.66.
- [3] Acharya S. *The Christ Conspiracy: The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (Kempton: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1999), pp.151-152.
- [4] *Ibid.*, p.79, 146, 164, 224, 360.
- [5] Personal email correspondence on 9/18/01.
- [6] Personal email correspondence on 9/19/01.
- [7] Jay Pasachoff is the Director of Hopkins Observatory, Chair of the Department of Astronomy at Williams College, Encarta expert on astronomy, and a member of the International Astronomical Union. In a 9/25/01 personal email correspondence he wrote, "*The exact divisions into 88 constellations covering 100% of the sky was adopted by the International Astronomical Union in 1928 and codified in 1930. But the constellation shapes are irregular, and the 12 zodiacal constellations are not exactly 30 degrees each. The sun actually travels through parts of 13 constellations each year.*" For more information pertinent to this topic, the reader is referred to Jay Pasachoff's *Field Guide To The Stars And Planets* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1999).
- [8] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.166.
- [9] *Ibid.*, pp.141-142.
- [10] *Ibid.*, p.142.
- [11] This dating of Genesis is evangelical. Other datings vary greatly. Do we know with certainty that the Israelites existed during this time? Yes. A memorial stele referred to as "The Israel Stele" has been found in Egypt and dates back to just before 1,200 BC. The inscription on it reads how Merneptah, the last Pharaoh of Dynasty 19 of the New Kingdom Period, had warred against and defeated some peoples. He mentions the Israelites and indicated that they were a large people who were spread out by planning. See Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, 10,000-586 BCE. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), p.234, 354.
- [12] In a personal email correspondence,

astronomer Jay Pasachoff writes, "*Many of the constellations were referred to in Homer in the 9th century BC. The Babylonians divided the zodiac into 12 constellations in the 5th c. BC.*"

[13] *Ibid.*, p.136. The Isaiah reference is Isaiah 47:12-13.

[14] See for example, Isaiah 47:13-14 and Ezekiel 8:14-18.

[15] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.139.

[16] See Genesis 31:30, 34-35.

[17] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.132.

[18] Willem A. VanGemeren, ed. *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, Vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), p.332. Harris, Archer, Waltke, eds. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol.1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), p.18.

[19] In a personal telephone conversation 9/18/01.

[20] The closest is Jeremiah 10:2 which refers to comets, meteors, and eclipses [cf. Isaiah 7:11]. However, God tells Jeremiah not to be alarmed by these. The popularity of the Septuagint (LXX) is noteworthy. Of the 330 times the Old Testament is quoted in the New Testament, the majority of the quotations are from the Septuagint.

[21] At the time of the writing of this paper, the book is not published. However, excerpts from the book may be found on her web site. See www.truthbeknown.com/kcrucified.htm for her attempt to establish that Krishna was crucified in Hindu legend.

[22] In a personal telephone conversation 9/6/01.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] At the time of the writing of this paper (11/01), the book is not published. However, excerpts from the book may be found on her web site. See www.truthbeknown.com/kcrucified.htm for her attempt to establish that Krishna was crucified in Hindu legend. See page 2 of the article.

[25] In a personal telephone conversation 9/6/01.

[26] *The Christ Conspiracy*, pp.116-117.

[27] Personal email correspondence on 9/20/01. The email is here cited. It includes Murdock's claim and Bryant's comments: 1) Krishna was born of the Virgin Devaki or "Divine One" on 12/25. "Yes. This is true. She was transmitted through the mind of Vasudeva." 2) His earthly father was a carpenter, who was off in the city paying tax while Krishna was born. "He was a cowherd chief. And he was, indeed, off in the city paying taxes, although this was just after Krishna was born." 3) His birth was signaled by a star in

the east and attended by angels and shepherds, at which time he was presented with spices. "Partially. The astrological configurations in general were very auspicious (but no mention of a specific star in the East). There were the Indian equivalent of angels (celestial beings who sing and play instruments). No shepherds – but cowherds were there. No spices, but the heavenly hosts rained down flowers." 4) The heavenly hosts danced and sang at his birth. "Yes." 5) He was persecuted by a tyrant who ordered the slaughter of thousands of infants. "Yes. This is very similar to Herod. The local king heard a divine voice stating that someone who was to be his death was to take birth from Devaki, Krishna's mother. So he killed all the infants who had been recently born in the entire area." 6) Krishna was anointed on the head with oil by a woman whom he healed. "Not quite. He was offered fragrant ointments by a hunchback woman, after which he healed her." 7) He is depicted as having his foot on the head of a serpent. "He subdued a 1000 headed serpent who has polluted the local river by dancing on its head with his feet." 8) He worked miracles and wonders, raising the dead and healing lepers, the deaf and the blind. "This is phrased in rather New Testament type terms, but Krishna did heal people and certainly performed many miracles." 9) Krishna used parables to teach the people about charity and love, and he lived poor and he loved the poor. "He didn't live particularly poorly, although his childhood was spent amongst the cowherd community. He certainly taught, although not specifically in parables. Krishna devotion is certainly available to the poor, and there are statements which directly favour them." 10) He castigated the clergy, charging them with ambition and hypocrisy. "Tradition says he fell victim to their vengeance. Well... he criticized the ritualistic brahmanas who were so absorbed in their rites they did not recognise him." 11) Krishna's "beloved disciple" was Arjuna (John). "Nothing to do with John." 12) He was transfigured in front of his disciples. "No." 13) He gave his disciples the ability to work miracles. "He didn't have disciples, exactly, but devotees. Some could perform supernatural things." 14) His path was "strewn with branches." "No." 15) In some traditions he died on a tree or was crucified between two thieves. "No." 16) Krishna was killed around the age of 30, and the sun darkened at his death. "I think he was 150. Inauspicious astrological omens erupted at his

death." 17) He rose from the dead and ascended to heaven in the sight of all men. *"He ascended to his abode in his selfsame body, although men only saw part of his ascent."* 18) He was depicted on a cross with nail-holes in his feet, as well as having a heart emblem on his clothing. "No." 19) Krishna is the lion of the tribe of Saki. *"Not Saki. Sura, or Yadu, are two of the dynasties with which he is associated."* 20) He was called the "Shepherd God" and considered the "Redeemer," "Firstborn," "Sin-Bearer," "Liberator," "Universal Word." *"No to the first (but cowherd god, OK), OK to the rest."* 21) He was deemed the "Son of God" and "our Lord and Savior," who came to earth to die for man's salvation. "No." 22) He was the second person of the Trinity. "No." 23) His disciples purportedly bestowed upon him the title "Jezeus," or "Jeseus," meaning "pure essence." "No." 24) Krishna is to return to judge the dead, riding on a white horse, and to do battle with the "Prince of Evil," who will desolate the earth. *"A future incarnation is Kalki, who will ride a white horse and kill all the demons in the future."*

[28] Benjamin Walker, *The Hindu World: An Encyclopedic Survey of Hinduism*, Vol.1 (New York: Praeger, 1983), pp.240-241.

[29] Personal email correspondence on 10/18/01.

[30] See, as examples, the article on the UCLA web site: www.sscnet.ucla.edu/southasia/Religions/texts/Puranas.html; and the short description of the Harivamsa provided by the San Diego Museum of Art: www.sdmart.org/exhibition-binney-literature.html.

[31] David V. Mason. Personal email correspondence on 11/6/01.

[32] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.118.

[33] Personal email correspondence on 9/20/01. I also asked Dr. Bryant regarding the historical evidence for Krishna as an historical rather than mythical figure. He responded that we know that people were worshipping Krishna as god in the fifth century (maybe sixth century) BC. However, there is nothing more than that in terms of evidence. Traditional sources place him 3,128 BC or about 2,500 years before our oldest historical evidence for him appears. This is quite different than the strong evidence we have for Jesus as an historical person.

[34] *The Christ Conspiracy*, pp.109-110.

[35] I have numbered these for the reader's convenience. They correspond with Murdock's list on pages 109-110, although she does not number

them. I have listed Murdock's claim followed by Dr. Yu's comments. Occasionally, I have added comments found in brackets. (1) Murdock: *"Buddha was born on December 25 of the virgin Maya, and his birth was attended by a 'Star of Announcement,' wise men and angels singing heavenly songs."* Yu: *"Queen Maya was Buddha's mother but she was declared to be a virgin. Rather, she conceived the Buddha after dreaming a white elephant entering her right side in the dream. Buddha was born on the 8th day of the lunar 4th month."* (2) Murdock: *"At his birth, he was pronounced ruler of the world and presented with 'costly jewels and precious substances.'" Yu: "At birth he took seven steps and declared that this would be his last birth and he would be the most honored one in the world."* (4) Murdock: *"Buddha was of royal lineage."* Yu: *"Buddha was a prince, the son of a king of a small kingdom in northern India or Nepal (his birthplace, Lumbini, has been claimed by both Nepal and India as being located in their territory)." (6) Murdock: "He crushed a serpent's head (as was traditionally said of Jesus) and was tempted by Mara, the 'Evil One,' when fasting."* Yu: *"Mara tempted him before his enlightenment but was defeated."* (10) Murdock: *"His followers were obliged to take vows of poverty and to renounce the world."* Yu: *"His followers were monks who lived in monasteries and observed chastity and non-attachment."* (14) Murdock: *"Buddha ascended bodily to Nirvana or 'heaven.'" Yu: "When he died, his body was cremated. He was not reborn again but said to be in Nirvana."* [This is not even close to bodily resurrection as Murdock would hope.] (15) Murdock: *"He was called 'Lord,' 'Master,' the 'Light of the World,' 'God of gods,' 'Father of the World,' 'Almighty and All-knowing Ruler,' 'Redeemer of All,' 'Holy One,' the 'Author of Happiness,' 'Possessor of All,' the 'Omnipotent,' the 'Supreme being,' the 'Eternal One.'" Yu: "He is called Lord and Tathagata ('Thus Come')." (18) Murdock: *"Buddha is to return 'in the latter days' to restore order and to judge the dead."* Yu: *"The Future Buddha called Maitreya ('The Friendly One') will be born as a human in the future just as the Buddha some 2500 years ago and revive the religion and bring peace to the world."* As you can readily see, Murdock mixes tradition with that which is not a part of Buddhist tradition. Some similarities are very weak as Dr. Yu points out. Others are quite unimpressive (e.g., 4, 10, that both are called "Lord" in 15).*

- [36] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.25.
- [37] Justin, *First Apology*, chapter 66.
- [38] Murdock and her sources are evidently unaware of this passage in Justin. For in her article "The 'Historical' Jesus", an excerpt from her forthcoming book, *Suns of God: Krishna, Buddha and Christ Unveiled*, she notes the existence of the "Memoirs of the apostles" mentioned by Justin, but claims that it "is a single book by that title, not a reference to several 'memoirs' or apostolic gospels" (p.8).
- [39] Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapters 100-107.
- [40] Acts 17:1-3.
- [41] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.25.
- [42] *Ibid.*, p.26.
- [43] These datings are from Clayton N. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996) and Lightfoot, Harmer, Holmes, eds. *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English translations of Their Writings*, Second Edition (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992).
- [44] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.26.
- [45] Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.36-41.
- [46] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.37.
- [47] *Ibid.*, p.38. The passage in Eusebius is from *Ecclesiastical History*, Book 4, Chapter 6.
- [48] *Ibid.*, p.33.
- [49] *Ibid.*, p.34.
- [50] Clement of Rome, To the Corinthians 5; Polycarp, To the Philippians 9:2.
- [51] Clement of Rome, To the Corinthians 5; Ignatius, To the Romans 4:3. Polycarp may also be referring to the apostolic status in his letter To the Philippians 12:1. In this verse, he quotes from Ephesians two times and refers to it as "Sacred Scripture." If indeed Paul wrote Ephesians, Polycarp is placing his authority on the highest level.
- [52] Polycarp, To the Philippians 3:2.
- [53] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.132.
- [54] Origen, *De Principiis* Book 1, Chapter 1, Section 19.
- [55] Another example embarrassing for Murdock is on pp.70-71 where she quotes T.W. Doane's citing of Origen on Celsus who "jeers at the fact that ignorant men were allowed to preach, and says that 'weavers, tailors, fullers, and the most illiterate and rustic fellows,' were set up to teach strange paradoxes. 'They openly declared that none but the ignorant (were) fit disciples for the God they worshiped,' and that one of their rules was, 'let no man that is learned come among us.'" The references are from Origen's *Contra Celsus*, Book 3. The first reference to "weavers, tailors ..." is from chapter 56 and the latter from chapter 44. In chapter 56, Origen answers Celsus' claims by asking him to provide examples that this is the case and adds, "But he will not be able to make good any such charge against us." In chapter 44, Origen answers Celsus, "although some of them [i.e., Christians] are simple and ignorant, they do not speak so shamelessly as he alleges." Again, if Ms. Murdock had checked her source, she would have found that he was gravely mistaken just as Celsus was.
- [56] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.41.
- [57] See his comments in *The Greek New Testament*, Third Edition (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1983), pp.xii-xiii.
- [58] *Ibid.*, pp.27-28.
- [59] *Ibid.*, p.46.
- [60] This is the only occurrence of the term "Christians" in the New Testament. The word occurs in the singular in Acts 26:28 and 1 Peter 4:16.
- [61] Clayton N. Jefford, *Reading the Apostolic Fathers: An Introduction* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1996), p.67.
- [62] *Ibid.*, p.5.
- [63] *Ibid.*
- [64] Cornelius Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44.
- [65] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.51.
- [66] See section below on Tacitus, "Non-biblical Sources who mention Jesus."
- [67] Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, *Letters*, Book 10, Letter 96.
- [68] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.51.
- [69] Robert E. Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament: An Introduction to the Ancient Evidence* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), p. 27 citing A.N. Sherwin-White in *The Letters of Pliny* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), pp.691-692.
- [70] Tertullian, *Part First, Apology*, chapter 50.
- [71] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.49.
- [72] *Ibid.*, p.50.
- [73] Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 18, Sections 116-119.
- [74] See the chapter by Edwin M. Yamauchi, "Jesus Outside the New Testament: What is the Evidence?" in Michael J. Wilkins and J.P.

Moreland, eds., *Jesus Under Fire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p.212.

[75] Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, p.98.

[76] *Ibid.*, p.103.

[77] John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, Volume One (New York: Doubleday, 1991), p.66.

[78] Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata, eds., *Josephus, The Bible, and History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), p.429.

[79] Josephus, Book 20, Section 200.

[80] Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, pp.83-84. Louis H. Feldman, translator, Josephus IX, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965), p.496.

[81] Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata, p.434.

[82] Louis H. Feldman and Gohei Hata, eds., *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), p.56.

[83] *Ibid.*, p.341.

[84] Yamauchi, "Jesus and the Scriptures," p.53.

[85] Van Voorst, *Jesus Outside the New Testament*, p.83.

[86] Elsewhere Feldman states that he has "noted more than a hundred discussion of this topic during the past fifty years" (*Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, p.55).

[87] Origen, *Commentary on Mathew* (see his comment on Matthew 10:17) and *Contra Celsus* 1:47.

[88] Van Voorst, p.88. He adds, "*Josephus says the same about Solomon (Ant. 18.5.2 §53) and Daniel (Ant. 10.11.2 §237), and something similar about John the Baptizer, whom he calls 'a good man' (Ant. 18.5.2 §116-9).*" Yamauchi, *Jesus Under Fire*, p.213.

[89] Meier, p.62. Van Voorst, p.90. Yamauchi, *ibid.*, p.213.

[90] Van Voorst, pp.91-92. Yamauchi, *ibid.*, p.213.

[91] Van Voorst, pp.103-104.

[92] Yamauchi, *ibid.*, pp.213-214.

[93] In a personal email correspondence on 8/28/01.

[94] *Josephus, Judaism, and Christianity*, p.339.

[95] "... *Josephus' mention of Jesus (A XVIII, 63f.) has been so much corrupted that no attempted reconstruction of the original can be relied on. At most the description, 'a doer of amazing works,' can be salvaged*" (*ibid.*, p.252).

[96] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.51.

[97] Meier, p.90.

[98] Van Voorst, pp.42-43, note 60.

[99] Tacitus had a unique style that included an economy of words. He was not prone to use redundant phrases within a sentence, but made his words count in other phrases if possible. *Ibid.*, p.43.

[100] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.19.

[101] Sir Norman Anderson, *Christianity and World Religions* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), chapters 1-3.

[102] Gary R. Habermas, "Resurrection Claims in Non-Christian Religions" in *Journal of Religious Studies*, 25, 1989.

[103] Edwin Yamauchi, *Jesus, Zoroaster, Buddha, Socrates, Muhammed* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1977), p.40.

[104] *Ibid.*, p.35.

[105] *Ibid.*, p.134.

[106] *Ibid.*, p.344.

[107] *Ibid.*

[108] *Ibid.*, p.345.

[109] When Freemasonry started in the 18th century, two men, James Anderson and John Desaguliers, used the operative tools of the craft to represent the speculative science of the lodge and assigned them moral truths. For example, the gavel breaks off the superfluities of life (i.e., sin). In antiquity, master masons were given a password so that they could identify themselves to other master masons in other countries in order to get work there. Passwords and handshakes were used for this purpose. This was later adopted into the lodge.

[110] A personal conversation with Jack Harris on 9/21/01. One may find more information on the origins and meanings behind Masonic rituals in Jack Harris, *Freemasonry: The Invisible Cult In Our Midst*.

[111] www.truthbeknown.com

[112] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.3.

[113] *Ibid.*, pp.36-37.

[114] *Ibid.*, pp.40-41.

[115] www.anthropress.org/AboutRudolf.htm

[116] One example of this is her comment on Tertullian that he believes because it is "shameful", "absurd", and "impossible" (*The Christ Conspiracy*, pp.24-25). However, if she had read Tertullian in context (Tertullian, *On The Flesh Of Christ*, chapters 4-5), she would have known that he was speaking sarcastically in response to Marcion's views and that her source, T. W. Doane, took him out of context.

[117] *Ibid.*, p.39.

[118] *Ibid.*, p.46.

[119] *Ibid.*, p.39.

[120] *Ibid.*, p.45.

[121] www.dictionary.com/cgi-bin/dict.pl?term=gospel

[122] This can be confirmed by any lexicon of Koiné Greek.

[123] *Free Inquiry*, Summer 2001, pp.66-67.

[124] *The Christ Conspiracy*, p.21.

[125] This comment from Old Testament scholar, Richard Patterson.

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