

Critical Review of Acharya S' *The Suns of God*

By R.G. Price

Let me preface this review with full disclosure. I myself am a critic of Christianity, I very much doubt the existence of a historical Jesus Christ, and I have written two minor books on the subject of the existence of Jesus, both of which take very different approaches to dealing with the development of early Christianity than the works of "Acharya S".

Having gotten that out of the way, let's move on to the review.

The Suns of God is a hefty 595 pages long. Within these pages Acharya S attempts to convince us that all religion originated from the worship of nature, primarily astronomical worship, and that Krishna, Buddha, and Jesus are all personifications of ancient sun gods, or perhaps "The Sun God", and thus of course never actually existed but are just myths.

To this last point I agree, though largely reasons that have little to do with the claims made in *The Suns of God*, and to all of the other points I disagree. At its core, *The Suns of God* rests on making the case for a "grand unifying theory" of all religious worship. This "grand unifying theory", according to Acharya, is "astrotheology". Astrotheology is, quite simply, theology based on the observation of celestial bodies.

Although Acharya does give tacit acknowledgment to some forms of nature worship other than the worship of the sun, moon, stars, and planets, the focus of her claims are clearly on the worship of the heavens, not the earth. Along the way Acharya completely rejects the possibility that the ancient gods could have or would have been based on anything other than deliberate "astrotheological" manifestations, attacking, for example the ancient Greek Euhemerist school, which claimed that the stories of ancient gods and heroes were mythologized accounts of real rulers and leaders from their own ancient past. Acharya reveals her emotional bias towards astrotheology when she states that, "*Euhemerism robs us of the beauty and wisdom that lie behind the myth: To wit, the observances of the awesome natural world and the cosmos. ... In the final analysis, the immortals were not men made into gods but gods made into men. And these gods were personifications of celestial and terrestrial bodies and forces.*"

Rather than getting sucked into an argument over the nature and development of religion around the world at this point however, the first step is to look at a range of claims made in *The Suns of God* to determine the credibility of the author and the credibility of the supposed facts upon which thesis of *The Suns of God* rests.

The Suns of God is a large work and, due to the nature of the writing, picking out specific claims to challenge is cumbersome. If one were to write a thorough analysis of the book to challenge every errant claim made in it the analysis would be longer than the book itself, because in essence every single page is filled with multiple errors, misrepresentations, and/or misdirections of one sort or another. In some cases, indeed in several cases, the author does hit upon some general ideas that are basically correct or reasonable, but the big picture is often completely undermined by the litany of "incorrect facts" and/or flawed reasoning used to support it.

I will thus focus on a relatively small sampling of claims from throughout the work to demonstrate the unreliability of the book. To a large degree this unreliability is not a product of Acharya's own fabrication, it is a product of her reliance upon, and total embrace of, unreliable sources, which she frequently quotes.

The first passage to address is one that demonstrates fundamental misrepresentation of human history.

"Others who developed this astronomical science included ancient mariners who journeyed thousands of miles through the open seas, such as the Polynesians, whose long, Pacific voyages have been estimated to have begun at least 30,000 years ago. The astronomical science allowed the ancients to predict weather patterns, the turn of the seasons and attendant climate changes, as well as comets, asteroids and meteors menacing the earth."

- pages 26-27

This passage is quite typical of the content in *The Suns of God*. In this short couple of sentences numerous errors are put forward. To call ancient celestial observation a "science" is by and large to mis-portray the nature of ancient sky watching. More importantly, however, to claim that the Polynesians were undertaking sea voyages around 30,000 years ago is a massive failure of scholarship. Likewise, to claim that ancient people used astronomical observations to predict weather patterns, asteroids, or meteors is a major failure of scholarship.

Certainly ancient people had some ability to predict weather patterns, but this had nothing to do with star gazing, it was more generally based on observations of plants and animals and the clouds. It is not possible to predict asteroids or meteors at all by any means of ancient celestial observation, because by and large these are not cyclical phenomena. Asteroids and meteors are, by their very nature, unpredictable. You can't see them with the naked eye until they enter the atmosphere and that, of course, is a one time event. Most comets are not predictable either, and the first person to predict the coming of a cyclical comet was Edmond Halley, who famously predicted the return of what is now called Halley's comet in 1758, after his study of hundreds of years of astronomical records in which he noticed the mention of a comet in 76 year intervals.

So, no, the ancients could not predict comets, they could not predict asteroids, they could not predict meteors, and they couldn't predict the weather based on observing the stars, other than the very general prediction of the changing of the seasons. That ancient people could predict the changing of the seasons is the only thing actually true in the quoted passage, and of course there is nothing extraordinary about predicting the seasons.

I'd like to return briefly to the claim that Polynesians were navigating the seas 30,000 years ago however. This claim is so far off the mark that it really calls into question Acharya's most basic understanding of human history. There is no evidence of anyone from any civilization doing any sea faring 30,000 years ago. Acharya's time frame for Polynesian seafaring is off by an order of magnitude. Such an egregious error severely undermines the general credibility of the author. Evidence of Polynesian culture goes back to about 1,500 BCE, or 3,500 year ago, not 30,000.

One could perhaps dismiss this as a slip, but this early dating of the importance of celestial observation to human cultures is a part of the basis for the claims made in *Suns of God*, and it also isn't the only such instance. Acharya also references Robert Graves in claiming that images in the Aurignacian caves of Spain from around 30,000 years ago depict an image of the Greek god Dionysus during a winter solstice celebration. This claim is preposterous on its face. There is no way to identify any image of anything from 30,000 years ago with any named god from any religion or culture. The claims made by Graves are totally baseless, including even the claims about this image being a depiction of a solstice festival, yet Acharya passes them along uncritically and uses them to support her argument that these solstice festivals go back into pre-history. These types of claims reflect a complete lack of basic understanding of human history.

This next passage demonstrates a common trait of Acharya's work, whereby she draws correlations that are completely unfounded and out of context, insinuating that they have meaning when in fact they

don't.

"Interestingly, buried around this structure were cattle, while the date of the 'temple' corresponds to the processional Age of Taurus the Bull, some 6500 to 4300 years ago."

- page 27

Basically, what Acharya is trying to claim here is that the sacrifice of bulls at a temple has some astrological significance by insinuating that these bulls were perhaps sacrificed because it was the "Age of Taurus". There are so many flaws here. The temple in question was dated to be about 6,000 years old, thus putting it into the "Age of Taurus", but did the Egyptians of 6,000 years ago even consider their own time the "Age of Taurus"? No, there is no evidence of such. Astrology and the zodiac have continued to evolve over time. The processional ages of the zodiac are more recent additions to the astrological field. Processional ages were first recorded by the Greek Hipparchus around 130 BCE, and there is no evidence that the bull was even a zodiac symbol of the Egyptians 6,000 years ago. Acharya is reading later ideas back into earlier times. Furthermore, bull sacrifices were extremely common in the ancient world, among Egyptians and others, and they continued long after the supposed "Age of Taurus". To imply that these bulls were sacrificed because the Egyptians were paying close attention to the zodiac is a blatant disregard of scholarship, especially since there is no need to make such claims to show that the ancient Egyptians did make use of zodiacs.

In her zeal to present all people and ideas about religion as related to astrotheology, Acharya incorrectly claims that the ancient Jewish writer Philo viewed the sun as divine.

"Like that of Plato, Philo's Logos, or Word, was the *sun*, which Philo apparently also believed to be a 'spiritual being full of virtue and perfection.' To wit, the sun was the Logos, the living Word, the only 'Son of God'."

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These claims are completely bogus. While the quotation that she provides is not cited, it seems to be a quote from some other author, not a primary-source quote from Philo. Philo most certainly does not, in any of his writings, describe the sun or any aspect of the inanimate material word as a living or spiritual being. To Philo the sun was created by the one and only God. It is a product produced by God, not a living or spiritual being itself. Nowhere does Philo, or Plato for that matter, associate the Logos with the sun, this is simply a flat out bogus claim. Philo considered the Logos the "agent of creation" and he considered the sun a part of the creation, so of course the sun could never be the Logos. Philo never clearly defines the Logos, but clearly it isn't the sun.

"But the shadow of God is his Logos, which he used like an instrument when he was making the world. And this shadow, and, as it were, model, is the archetype of other things. For as God is himself the model of that image which he [Moses] has now called a shadow, so also that image is the model of other things, as he showed when he commenced giving the law to the Israelites, and said, 'And God made man according to the image of God,' as the image was modeled according to God, and as man was modeled according to the image, which thus received the power and character of the model."

- Philo

"But God is the creator of time also; for he is the father of its father, and the father of time is the world, which made its own mother the creation of time, so that time stands towards God in the relation of a grandson; for this world is a younger son of God, inasmuch as it is perceptible by the outward sense; for the only son he speaks of as older than the world, is Logos, and this is not perceptible by the intellect; but having thought the other worthy of the rights of primogeniture, he has decided that it shall remain with him; therefore, this younger son, perceptible by the external senses being set in motion, has caused the nature of time to shine

forth, and to become conspicuous, so that there is nothing future to God, who has the very boundaries of time subject to him; for their life is not time, but the beautiful model of time, eternity; and in eternity nothing is past and nothing is future, but everything is present only."
- *On the Unchangeableness of God*; Philo

"Now the image of God is the Logos, by which all the world was made."
- *The Special Laws*; Philo

Acharya makes a similar bogus claim on page 52, where she claims that the early Christian apologist Origen believed that the sun, moon, and stars were living rational beings with souls, and that he got this idea from the Jewish scriptures, implying that Origen thus proved that the Jewish scriptures make such claims. Again we are dealing with a series of mis-portrayals of the information, further convoluting it instead of clarifying it. Origen, a born pagan who was brought up in the schools of Greek philosophy, was arguing with a pagan philosopher and used a statement about the sun, moon, and stars "following the commends of God", to argue against the idea being put forth by his opponent that the sun, moon, and stars were unchangeable and static. In the process he cited Jewish scriptures, such as "*I have given a commandment to all the stars,*" from Job, to make his case. This does not, in any way, actually mean that the Jewish scriptures convey the idea that the stars are living beings with souls. Origen here was clearly misusing and misinterpreting the scriptures in order to make his point. Acharya, however, attempts to claim that Origen proved, or was also aware of, the supposed "fact" that the Jewish scriptures considered the sun, moon, and stars living beings with souls, which is clearly not the case. Origen didn't prove anything, he misused scriptures to make a philosophical argument against an opponent because he couldn't think of any better way to make his case. It is not even clear that he actually believed this, since he made contradictory arguments in other writings.

Next we move on to a variety of bogus claims about the Greek god Dionysus. Acharya, like many others before her, tries vainly to portray Dionysus as a virtual template for the character of Jesus, yet in fact there are nothing more than vague superficial similarities between the two figures.

"Like his birth, Dionysus' death is also archetypical [sic], resembling that of Osiris and the later Jesus: The god dies violently, is resurrected and ascends to heaven. ... Like his Syrian counterpart Adonis, Dionysus was called 'Dendrites,' or 'he of the tree,' which would seem to convey that Dionysus was also hung on a tree, a motif and ritual common in the areas in which Dionysus worship thrived. ... Further evidence of this Dionysian crucifixion is provided by the amulet with the image of a crucified man bearing the inscription 'Orpheus-Bakkikos' beneath it."

- page 102

Acharya does go on to admit that the amulet in question dates from the 3rd century CE, and thus is seen as a "pagan" copy of the Christian motif, not the other way around, but then she says that there is no basis for this claim and that there is no reason not to conclude that it was really Christianity that copied from the pagan theme (though there is no evidence of this theme prior to Christianity).

Many different people have tried to draw parallels between various stories that involve Dionysus and Jesus, and there are a few similarities, but they are quite vague, and likewise the ways in which they are similar don't relate back to the earliest accounts of Jesus, they relate to later accounts, and thus couldn't really tell us much about the earliest origins of the Jesus cult anyway.

The death of Dionysus is similar to that of Osiris, indeed it probably is copied from the story of Osiris. In this story the body of Dionysus, or Osiris, is torn to pieces and scattered around the world, after which it is reassembled and he comes back to life when he then enters the afterlife. In this story, however, the death of Dionysus/Osiris is not considered a redeeming sacrifice for humanity, indeed it has nothing to do with that. Furthermore, the themes in the story of Jesus have much stronger parallels,

both theologically and narratively, to Jewish literature than they do to any pagan story.

The association of Dionysus with the name Dendrites has nothing to do with being "hung from a tree", as the crucifixion of Jesus was described in some New Testament texts because of passages in the Jewish scriptures that prescribe being "hung from a tree" for capital offenses. Dionysus was associated with trees as a mischievous woodland figure and fertility god. There is nothing in Dionysian mythology that has anything to do with being hung from a tree. Acharya apparently knows this and is thus forced to stretch by merely implying this to be the case based on a minor alias of Dionysus.

As for the infamous Bacchus crucifixion amulet, the amulet is from the 3rd century and there is actually no reason not to conclude that it is an emulation of the Christian story and not evidence of some pre-existing Dionysus crucifixion motif. By the time this amulet would have been made the Jesus story would have been popularly known for over 200 years. Acharya points out that no images of the crucifixion of Jesus were made until the 6th or 7th century, but this isn't quite true, and doesn't matter anyway. Clearly the story existed long before then. Plus, there is the famous 2nd century Alexamano Graffiti that mockingly depicts the crucifixion as well as the fact that there are Christian images of the crucifixion that date to the 5th century. At any rate, the early Christians simply had taboos against depictions of Christ, especially of the crucifixion. The lack of these images doesn't mean that there was no concept of the crucifixion, only that there were taboos against depicting it in artwork.