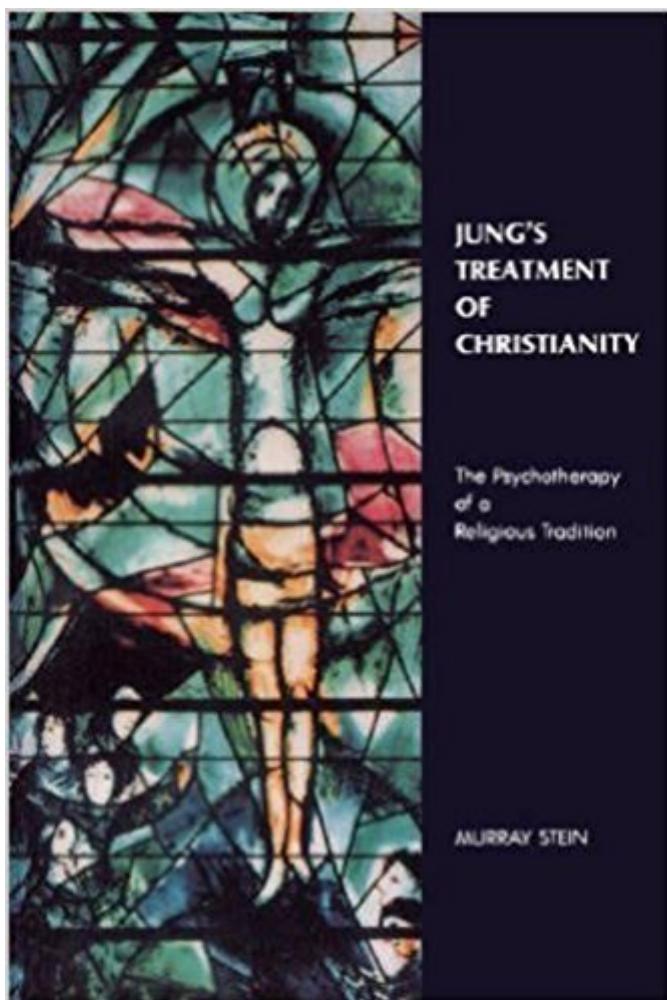


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# Jung's Treatment Of Christianity: The Psychotherapy Of A Religious Tradition



## **Synopsis**

An insightful and convincing interpretation of Jung's encounter with Christianity. In the last 20 years of his life, Jung wrote extensively on the Trinity, the Mass, alchemy and the Bible, in what Stein understands as his effort to help Christianity evolve into its next stage of development. Here, Stein provides a comprehensive analysis of Jung's writings on Christianity in relation to his personal life, psychological thought and efforts to transform Western religion.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Murray Stein is a Jungian analyst who until recently had a private practice in Wilmette, Illinois, but who now lives in Switzerland. He is the author and editor of numerous books, including Jung's Treatment of Christianity, In Midlife and Jungian Analysis. He is the co-editor of The Chiron Clinical Series.

Steven B. Herrmann, PhD, MFT Author of "William Everson: The Shaman's Call" When I read Stein's book "Jung's Treatment of Christianity" in 1997 I was moved by a number of passages that hold a special meaning for me. Some of these passage led me to wonder about the direction of Christianity, and what Jung was attempting to do to help Western civilization move forward towards a new orienting symbol of Wholeness. Stein helps to elucidate this. According to Stein "Jung's stance toward Christianity was fundamentally that of a psychotherapist, and so the goal of all his efforts with this 'patient,' Christianity, was its psychotherapeutic transformation" (18). As Jung

emerged from his crisis of midlife Stein says that he had to shed this persona as empirical scientist through his confrontation with the images of the philosopher-theologian, prophet, and finally, with the image of the "shamanic healer," the most primordial symbol of wholeness in the human psyche. Stein points to Jung's vision in 1939, of Christ on the Cross, which led Jung to offer up a meaning to Christianity, for a possible cure to its "illness," namely "the goal of its development toward wholeness" (149). This meaning was constellated, Stein says, as a result of Jung's "shamanic" suffering of his Christian heritage" (149). In Stein's view, Jung took up this "shamanic" wounded-healer position in his most controversial book, *Answer to Job*. About the peculiar style of this work Stein writes: "This is the approach of the shamanic healer who allows himself to become infected with the illness of the patient" (164). Another beautiful passage is as follows: "As the old God-image of Christianity dies and decays, a new one is being incubated" (182). What is the new image of God that Jung and Stein see is incubating? In Stein's view "The image of God as quaternity in conjunction with the concept of human wholeness would function in this transformed religious tradition as the master symbol" (187). This is book that is sure to interest anyone who is concerned with the religious situation in the world.

JUNG'S TREATMENT OF CHRISTIANITY is for me one of the most important contributions to the psychology of religion published in the past 30 years. The book's conceit (if you will) is that Jung approached Christianity as a client or analysand, an intact personality, whom he in effect analyzed. The author embraces nearly the whole sphere of Jung's thinking on western religion including traditions which we might consider occult but which have clear historical importance (gnosticism, for example). Besides providing a nice overview of Jungian theory, the book presents a compelling and humanistic picture of how Jung saw Christianity in its fullest context. Its implications are very significant. How interesting it would be to speculate on how "postmodern" theological developments (like liberation theology) might have presented them to an analytic interpretation. Stylistically, the book is a fine read, too. Highly recommended.

Jung's treatment of Christianity is fast becoming very seductive to many streams of thought and therapy within the Christian community. It is penetrating deep into Christianity's liberal side as well as into its charismatic, inner healing side. Therefore, a more systematic understanding of Jung's thought is imperative to the discerning evangelical. Stein gives an excellent categorization of past interpretations of Jung's work, as well as adds his own interpretation. He contends that Jung's writings on Christianity, as well as other religions, reflect "neither a reductionistic nor a revitalistic

attitude, as has been claimed by most of his other interpreters, but rather an evolutionary-transformational one" (p. 19). Jung offers therapy that will enable Christianity to be healed and regain its sense of wholeness, much in the same way that he offers therapy to individuals. Thus, Jung's treatment of Christianity is inherently linked to his theory about the nature of humanity and personality as a whole. His theory and therapy is of one piece. Stein lucidly describes the development of Jung's theory in a Jungian manner. Indeed, Jung himself read the "history of Christianity as the developmental history of a patient: for splits (between good and evil, masculine and feminine), for repressions (of Gnosticism and alchemy), and for historical developments of one-sidedness (the spiritual perfectionism and anti-naturalism of Christianity). This book gives an illuminating overview of Jung's own faith, and is necessary reading for every Christian interpreter of Jung. Stein isn't critical of Jung, but is widely sympathetic with his task. In his sympathy, Stein reveals what most evangelicals would call Jung's dark side. Jung was involved in the occult since childhood. His mother would even hold séances at his home. He felt that he communicated with the dead, believed in astrology, and believed that the solutions to the universe lied in alchemy. Freud rejected him, among other reasons, for his mysticism. Jung even did his doctoral dissertations on mediums. In short, Jung's religion was a nature religion with a supernatural twist. It lies bound within the traditions of Eastern patheistic monism. Disease lies in duality, and thus Christianity is diseased and in need of therapy. Instead of looking outward to a transcendent God for healing, Jung believed that self-awareness was the key. Indeed, Satan and evil must be seen as the fourth person in the Trinity. The Shadow must be given equal status in the pantheon, both in metaphysics and in the human psyche. Stein's sympathetic treatment of Jung makes us all beware of too easily accepting contemporary psychological theory and therapy, when it is in reality a wolf in sheep's clothing, paganistic occultism disguised in rationalistic, scientific psycho-babble. Jung's treatment of Christianity is little more than a revival of the old paganism, the occult, alchemy, and the myth of the Great Babylon. (Don't forget that Jung was not alone in his occultism: many other of the greats in psychological theory look Eastward, including Horney, Fromm, Rogers, Maslow, and even Fowler.)

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