

Book Review: *Christianity As Mystical Fact*

In his 1914 book *Christianity As Mystical Fact: And the Mysteries of Antiquity*, Rudolf Steiner states his intention “to show...through mystical knowledge, how the source of Christianity prepared its own ground in the mysteries of pre-Christian times.” His discussion begins with the esoteric Mystery traditions, which he asserts, have always existed alongside the popular exoteric religions.

Steiner makes reference to the existence of a hidden council that has “appointed the initiations for us are not at all ordinary people,” but rather “those who have devoted themselves in the right way to wisdom.” The author moves through esoteric philosophy, discussing how duality itself permits the incarnation of the transitory whose purpose may be to turn strife into harmony. This recalls to mind Alice A. Bailey’s fourth ray of harmony through conflict.

Steiner introduces students to his idea of man’s personal “daimon” which appears to be equatable to what Bailey calls the “reincarnating jiva.” The daimon is given as the reason some people are born with greater skill, perspective, and potential; because the daimon brought it forward from previous lives. This may be further related to Bailey’s idea of “permanent atoms.”

Steiner devotes a chapter to Plato, of whom he states that the only way to understand him thoroughly, is in the light of the Mysteries. This recalls to mind Henrik Nielsen’s recent book *The Esoteric Plato and the Tibetan*, which draws important parallels between Plato and Alice A. Bailey’s teachings transmitted by the Tibetan, Djwhal Khul. Even as Plato refers to the human body as the “prison of the divine,” he asserts that the essential task of philosophers has always been to separate the soul from the body; the eternal from the temporal.

Steiner provides a short theory of the history of mysticism, through which he imparts an impressive perspective on its esoteric symbolism. He unmask the myths of Theseus and the Minotaur, ultimately stating that “man is confronted with his own sense-nature in the form of a hostile monster.” Humankind must, therefore, destroy this lower nature in order to free our selves from the maze of human sense-based existence. He proceeds to offer valuable interpretations of various other myths: Osiris, Heracles, the Argonauts and the Golden Fleece, Prometheus, Homer’s Odyssey, and the Eleusinian myths.

Steiner next moves through the mystical origin of the Gospels, stating that “the Buddhists narrated the life of their divine man almost in the same way in which the Evangelists narrated the life of Christ.” That is to say that Steiner identified a common pattern in the lives of these “Sons of God.” He attributes the differences in approach and symbolism between the gospel writers as being due to them drawing from four different mystery traditions. The Lazarus Miracle is treated next, with the distinction that the story is only related in the Bible by John the Revelator. Steiner makes a strong case that the tale of raising Lazarus from the dead is a parable for initiation in the mysteries, stating “What he attains spiritually, he lives through symbolically.”

The Apocalypse of St. John is next analyzed, and Steiner is careful to note what it reveals is “sent in signs.” Once again a divine council of twenty-four is mentioned, and the action in the book is described by Steiner as being “a leading to God: it is an ‘initiation’ which is bestowed on St. John.” He concludes his analysis here by stating that the book’s primary importance is that it asserts that the “Mysteries are no longer to be kept under lock and key.” Through the life of Christ Jesus, they were laid open to all humankind.

Jesus is next analyzed in his relationship to the Essenes and Therapeutae, who both perceived that “the object of this life was the conquest of the lower nature in man, so that the spirit latent within him might be awakened more and more.” Steiner introduces Neo-Platonism and describes these groups as forming a natural transition from the Mysteries to Christianity, describing mysticism as “an immediate consciousness and feeling of the divine within the soul.”

St. Augustine arises to close the book, whom Steiner quotes as offering solace to those of us who are unable to access the depth within ourselves that other mystics claim to access, “Go as far as you can on the path of knowledge with your human powers, thence trust (faith) will carry you up into the higher spiritual regions.”

1. Steiner, Rudolf. *Christianity as Mystical Fact: And the Mysteries of Antiquity*. Translated by Harry Collison, Rudolf Steiner Press, 1914.

<https://www.amazon.com/Christianity-Mystical-Fact-Mysteries-Antiquity/dp/1790750253>.

2. Nielsen, Henrik. *The Esoteric Plato and the Tibetan*. Forlaget X, 2025.

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/8799392461>.