

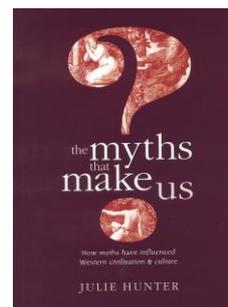


The Myths that Make Us

How Myths have Influenced Western Civilisation and Culture

by Julie Hunter,

Hazard Press, Christchurch, RRP \$34.99



"I have struggled with Christianity most of my life, finding the Old Testament too violent with its emphasis on sin and punishment, and the New Testament unbelievable. Yet, I knew there was something deeply religious in me."

This is how Julie Hunter took the path opposite to the current fashion led by Dawkins, Dennett and Hitchens. Looking for the baby in the bath-water led Julie to the subject of myth and Joseph Campbell's summary "Myths are public dreams, dreams are private myths". Her professional experience, gained as a service provider to the Accident Compensation Corporation, led her to identify the profound effects of 'personal myths'. Further research led her from Sumerian civilisation to the present day while, on the way, looking into Babylonia, Abraham, Christianity and Mysticism.

The God of the Old Testament is put in his place with a quote from Carl Jung: "The absence of human morality in Yahweh is a stumbling block which cannot be overlooked ... "

We might note that this is the starting point of complaints that led to Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*, to Sam Harris' *The End of Faith*, and to Christopher Hitchens' *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*.

The Gospel of Thomas (which is printed in full in an Appendix) is introduced with appreciation for its seminal status in underpinning all other Gospels, a status in line with The Jesus Seminar's promotion of it. Julie Hunter usefully distinguishes (on page 47) between the interiorised divinity preached by Jesus and the exterior figure of God promoted by Paul, and (on page 74) between the attention-diverting accounts of Jesus' miracles and his far more important sage-wisdom.

The link into the psychological world is touched on (on page 100) through the author's noting that 'myth', 'mysticism' and 'mystery' are all derived from the same Greek word. It is here that metaphors, myths and symbols become indispensable forms of expression. Inevitably this requires reason to be relativised, though not abandoned.

It is useful to remember that the title speaks of the Myths that Make Us — that is, it is an ongoing process.

This book depicts the process well.

Noel Cheer