Origins of the Christian Kabbalah

John F. Nash

Summary

This article explores the emergence of the Christian Kabbalah from its Judaic antecedents. The birth of that major feature of the western esoteric tradition was made possible by the confluence of traditions in the High Middle Ages and Renaissance when Jewish mystical texts and insights became available to Christian scholars. The Christian Kabbalah first appeared in Florence in the early 15th century and spread to Germany and the rest of Europe. It had obvious theological applications, but much interest also focused on discovering the timeless underpinnings of all world religions and on healing the breach among Christians, Jews and Muslims.

The Christian Kabbalah was part of a more general investigation of occult traditions which included Hermeticism—a combination of astrology, alchemy and magic. Unfortunately, from the standpoint of the tradition's purity, Hermeticism steered the Christian Kabbalah away from its intellectual and mystical roots toward a preoccupation with magic. Not surprisingly, ecclesiastical authorities became increasingly suspicious, although hostility was also motivated by prevailing anti-Semitism. In any event, the Christian Kabbalah—like its Judaic antecedent—never became a mass movement; it remained the pursuit of a small elite of scholars, aristocrats and churchmen.

Background

By the 13th century Sephardic Jewish scholars from Baghdad to Spain were actively engaged in Kabbalistic studies.[1] But Christian scholars were virtually ignorant of their work, and the Kabbalah had no appreciable impact on Christian doctrine or even on its underlying mindset. Over the next several centuries all that would change; a "Christian Kabbalah" emerged, to the dismay of both Christian ecclesiastical authorities and rabbinic Jewish authorities.

The objective of this article is to explore the emergence of the Christian Kabbalah, from the 14th to the end of the 17th century. The intent of this article is not to present a comprehensive exploration of either the Judaic or the Christian Kabbalah; nor could that be done in a journal article of any reasonable length. Due attention is paid to major topics of interest that captivated the Christian Kabbalists, but the article's thrust is primarily historical.

Numerous works on the Judaic Kabbalah and its incorporation into 19th and 20th-century esotericism are readily available.[2] Development of the Christian Kabbalah from the 17th century onward, and the more detailed exploration of its outcomes, can be subjects for further study.

Classical Judaic Kabbalah

The *Kabbalah* (Hebrew: קבלה, "received" or "tradition") has its roots in an oral tradition of Jewish mysticism, extending back to biblical times, perhaps even to Moses or Abraham.[3] That tradition was viewed as divine revelation, interpreted and commented upon by generations of mystics and scholars. However, the Judaic tradition eventually became overlaid by Pythagorean, Platonic and Neoplatonic metaphysics.[4] The classical Kabbalistic texts were

About the Author

John F. Nash, Ph.D., is a long-time esoteric student, author and teacher. Two of his books, *Quest for the Soul* and *The Soul and Its Destiny*, were reviewed in the Winter 2005 issue of the *Esoteric Quarterly*. His latest book is *Christianity: the One, the Many*. See the advertisements on page 10 of this issue and also the website: www.uriel.com.

published in Spain and southern France in the 12th and 13th centuries, but most likely they were based on manuscripts or at least fragments dating back to the early centuries of the Common Era. The texts included the *Sefer ha-Bahir* (ספר הבהיר, "Book of Illumination"), the *Sefer Yetzirah* (ספר יצירה, "Book of Creation"), and the monumental *Sefer ha-Zohar* (ספר הזוהר, "Book of Splendor"). The *Zohar* was written in the style of Midrashic and Talmudic texts, offering discursive commentary on the *Torah* and other books in the Hebrew Bible.[5]

The Kabbalah appealed both to the intellect and to the intuition, providing a system of esoteric symbolism with theological, contemplative, theurgical and psychological potential. The elaborate schema of the Tree of Life was the work of 16th-century Jewish scholars in Palestine. But even in 1400 there was broad understanding of the *sefiroth* (singular: *sefirah*, ספירה), a word whose roots connoted "number," "writing," and "sound" or "revelation."[6] The number symbolism clearly reflected Pythagorean—or perhaps earlier Egyptian—influence. The *Zohar* also described the *Ain Soph* (אין סוף), the unmanifest, unknowable Godhead from which the emanations emerge.[7] The sephiroth can be viewed variously as successive emanations of the divine essence, as the forms or "vessels" into which those emanations flowed, as divine "persons" in the sense of the persons of the trinity, as *logoi* intermediate between the Godhead and humanity, or as archetypal forces of great potency.

The original sefiroth, numbered 1-10, were known by the following archetypal names: *Kether* (כתר, "Crown"), *Chokmah* (חכמה, Wisdom"), *Binah* (בינה, "Understanding"), *Chesed* (חסד, "Mercy"), *Geburah* (גבורה, "Judgment"), *Tifareth* (תפארת, "Beauty" or "Harmony"), *Netzach* (נצח, "Victory" or "Eternity"), *Hod* (הוד, "Splendor"), *Yesod* (יסוד, "Foundation"), and *Malkuth* (מלכות, "Kingdom"). *Gedulah* (גדולה, "Greatness") was used as an alternative name for Chesed, and Din (דין, "Severity") as an alternative to Geburah. *Tabun* (תבון, "Intelligence") was an alternative to Binah. A later addition to the sefiroth, *Daath* (דעת, Knowledge" or "Gnosis"), was left unnumbered. The Hebrew names, English translations, and interpretations of the sefiroth are summarized for quick reference in Appendix 1.[8]

The Kabbalah also provided a guide to spiritual development, inviting seekers to explore the nature of Divinity and its creation as well as the higher reaches of the human psyche. The *Sefer Yetzirah* discussed 32 paths, or *netivoth* (singular: *nativ*, נתיב), to God. Ten of those "paths" corresponded to the sefiroth, while the remaining 22, each identified by a letter in the Hebrew alphabet, became identified with the relationships among them. The *netivoth* offered seekers distinctive spiritual challenges and opportunities.

Finally, and not incidentally, forms of experiential Kabbalah emerged that focused on the names of God and the names of angels and archangels related to the sefiroth. Invocation of the divine names offered the potential for ecstatic mysticism and also for the acquisition of occult powers. Magic was not a major feature of the medieval Judaic Kabbalah, but it was not neglected either.[9]

Later Developments

The modern Judaic Kabbalah owes a great deal to the work of a community of 16th-century Jewish scholars who settled in Safed (Tzafed), Galilee, traditional burial site of the second-century rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, mentioned in the *Zohar*.[10]

Preeminent among the Safed scholars were Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (1522–1570) and Isaac ben Solomon Luria (1534–1572). The former was a Spanish émigré, one of tens of thousands of Jews expelled from Spain in 1492, while the latter was born in Palestine of German parents. Cordovero and Luria proposed alternative versions of the Tree of Life, providing a new understanding of geometric relationships among the sefiroth. Their work drew attention to the rich symbolism of polarities which is so much a feature of modern Kabbalistic study.

The Safed school also promoted belief in a primeval cosmic catastrophe in which the sefi-

roth were shattered by influx of the divine force. That catastrophe is referred to as the "breaking of the vessels."[11] God had to repair the sefiroth in order for the universe to come into permanent manifestation; but the damage had longer-lasting implications. "Shards" of the broken vessels, each of which contained a divine spark, were scattered throughout the world, and devout Jews are responsible for gathering the shards to reestablish divine order.[12]

Bridge to Christian Europe

The Kabbalah came to the attention of western Christian scholars through several channels. Important Kabbalistic schools had been established in Moorish Spain and in Provence in the south of France. The Provençal scholar and mystic Isaac the Blind (c.1160–1235) compiled and edited the *Bahir* and the *Sefer Yetzirah*. Moses de Leon (1250–1305), who lived in Castile, compiled the *Zohar* and added extensive commentary. The newly available books, written in Hebrew or Aramaic,[13] soon became available to Christian scholars.

Also, Jewish scholars were dispersed throughout Europe as a result of the general Diaspora which had been in progress for centuries,[14] and contact with Christian scholars was almost inevitable. Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia (1240–c.1295) whose studies included Kabbalah, philosophy, linguistics and numerology was born in Saragosa, Spain, but traveled widely throughout the Mediterranean region, including Rome. He became fascinated with gematria[15] and with permutations of letters in the divine names, particularly the unutterable Tetragrammaton, יהוה.[16] Ben Abulafia contributed much to the development of the ecstatic mystical Kabbalah.[17] We shall see later that he narrowly escaped execution by the Catholic Church.

The Italian rabbi Menahem ben Benjamin Recanati whose life spanned the end of the 13th century and the early part of the 14th devoted a major part of his work to the Kabbalah. Two centuries later, the Jewish humanist scholar Yohanan Alemanno (c.1435–1505), who settled in Florence, combined Hebraic and Kabbalistic studies with interests in Neoplatonism and magic.

Figure 1. Petrus Alphonsi's Glyph of the Trinity

Many Jewish scholars converted to Christianity and incorporated esoteric Jewish teachings into their new faith.[18] For example, Moses Sephardi (1062–1110) was baptized in 1106 and took the new name Petrus Alphonsi. Born in Aragon, he eventually moved to England and may have served as a court physician to King Henry I. Petrus created a glyph relating the Tetragrammaton to the Christian trinity (Figure 1), a forerunner of the Tree of Life constructed five centuries later. Another convert to Christianity was Samuel ben Nissim Abulfaraj, an Italian Jewish humanist scholar who resided in Florence and wrote under the pseudonym Flavius Mithridates. He is best known for his Latin translations of 3,500 pages of Hebrew mystical works, including the *Biblioteca Cabbalistica*, a large compilation of Kabbalistic literature. Yet another convert was Dactylus Hebraeus; he was mentioned by Giovanni Pico, whose work will be discussed shortly, but we know little else about him.

As the Byzantine Empire went into decline, many Eastern Orthodox scholars came to the west, bringing with them collections of rare manuscripts in Greek, Hebrew and Arabic. Wealthy patrons of Renaissance scholarship sent emissaries in search of additional manu-

scripts to stock their libraries. Among those manuscripts were Greek classics, currently unknown in the west. It should be remembered that Latin had long been the sole language of scholarly discourse in the west, and few western scholars understood Greek; even fewer could read the Semitic languages.

Other manuscripts addressed Kabbalistic or Hermetic topics.[19] Hermeticism had a lineage distinct from that of the Kabbalah, although it is possible to argue that they had a common origin in prehistory. In any event, the Hermeticism we know was a body of philosophical, alchemical, magical and astrological teachings of Egyptian, Persian, and possibly Chaldean origin. The term "Hermeticism" reflected a common belief that it represented the secret teachings of Hermes Trismegistus ("Thrice-Great Hermes"), revered as "father of Occult Wisdom; the founder of Astrology; the discoverer of Alchemy."[20] At the time of the Renaissance, that Hermes—a conflation of the Egyptian Thoth, the Greek Hermes, and the Roman Mercury—was thought to have been a real person from remote antiquity.[21] Whatever the teachings' real origin may have been, the extant Hermetic texts are now thought to have been written in the early centuries of the Common Era. Hermeticism, even more than the Kabbalah, overlapped with Neoplatonic and Gnostic thought.

Christian Kabbalists of the Renaissance

The Christian Kabbalah first took definite form in the 15th century, in the city-state of Florence in northern Italy. It was one of a number of exciting "new" fields of interest in the Florentine Renaissance. Others were Neoplatonism, which would reinforce the Hellenic content of the Kabbalah, and Hermeticism.

When a mid-15th-century Florentine proclaimed "*mi pare renascere*" ("I seem to be reborn"), he gave birth to the term "Renaissance" by which we refer to the cultural and intellectual rebirth that had begun a few decades earlier.[22] It was driven by a dream of recovering the greatness of classical Greece and Rome, together with an economic boom that offered hope that the dream might be fulfilled. The new wealth enabled leading families to support scholarship and the arts. Foremost among those families were the Medicis, particularly the three generations consisting of Cosimo de' Medici (1389–1464), hailed by his fellow citizens as *Pater Patriae* ("Father of the Fatherland"); his sickly son Piero; and his grandson Lorenzo, "the Magnificent."

Italian Scholars

Among many other endeavors, the Medicis established a library that soon became the largest in the world since the destruction of the Ptolemaic library in Alexandria. Dispatched by Lorenzo on just one of his book-buying sprees, Giovanni Lascaris returned from the east with more than 200 ancient manuscripts.[23] The library's collection became a treasure trove of religious, philosophical and esoteric manuscripts that attracted leading scholars to Florence. Moreover, the broad range of languages in which they were written stimulated linguistic studies. The Vatican Library in Rome, though smaller at that time, also grew rapidly in size. The "library of Eugenius IV in the first half of the fifteenth century contained 340 books… but by the time Nicolas V died in 1455 there were… almost twelve hundred volumes."[24] By 1484 the collection had expanded to 3,600 volumes, of which 1,000 were in Greek.

In 1438 representatives from the eastern and western churches met at Ferrara, near Bologna, to try to heal the Great Schism of 1054. Later, Pope Eugenius moved the meeting to Florence, and now it is customarily known as the Council of Florence. Deliberations continued until 1445.[25] A prominent member of the Orthodox contingent was the Greek philosopher and esotericist Georgius Gemistos, also known as Plethon. Gemistos had studied at the Islamic School of Theology at Brusa, in northwestern Turkey, and was an authority on Zoroaster and Plato. He also promoted an esoteric version of Christianity with Neoplatonic leanings. His lectures in Florence attracted the attention of Cosimo de' Medici, and he was persuaded to remain in Florence after the council concluded.[26]

In addition to the library, Cosimo de' Medici founded the *Accademia Fiorentina o Societa di Eloquenza*, or Florentine Academy or Society for Eloquence, in 1541.[27] The Academy competed, but also contrasted, with great centers of learning like the Universities of Paris and Cologne. Whereas the latter preserved the Aristotelian mindset of 13th-century scholasticism, the Florentine Academy saw a return to Plato as its guiding influence; indeed the Academy was viewed as a recreation of Plato's school in Athens. The Academy acquired a well-deserved reputation for the study of Greek, whereas the University of Padua, which the Medicis also founded, focused on Latin studies. Study of Plato and Neoplatonism was accompanied by a synthesis of ideas from other exoteric and esoteric sources. The latter took on a special mystique because of a widely held belief during the Renaissance that wisdom came from the east, perhaps from sources predating both Hebrew and Greek traditions.[28] The notion that *Matthew*'s three wise men came from the east played into that belief.

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), is regarded as the first true Christian Kabbalist. Born into a noble family, he became one of the most influential scholars of the early Renaissance… Pico accepted the claims of Jewish mystics that the Kabbalah represented an unbroken oral tradition dating back at least to Moses and Mount Sinai… His work stimulated interest in the Kabbalah and other aspects of Judaism throughout Christian Europe.

Priest and scholar Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499) was appointed head of the Florentine Academy and in due course was chosen by Piero de' Medici to tutor his son Lorenzo.[29] Ficino set out to translate the entire works of Plato into Latin, but for a while he was reassigned to translate the *Corpus Hermeticum* from its original Greek. The 15-17 treatises of the *Corpus* had already been compiled into a single volume by Byzantine editors. Ficino's translation was published in 1463 and reprinted more than 20 times over the next 150 years. Like most of his contemporaries, Ficino believed that the *Corpus Hermeticum* had been written by a real, very ancient, Hermes Trismegistus.

Ficino's most famous student, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494), is regarded as the first true Christian Kabbalist. Born into a noble family, he was an intellectual prodigy who studied in Padua and Rome before moving to Florence.[30] He became one of the most influential scholars of the early Renaissance. Estimates that Pico knew 22 languages[31] may have been colored by the esoteric significance of that number—for instance, there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet—but we do know that he was tutored in Hebrew and Aramaic by Samuel ben Nissim Abulfaraj and Yohanan Alemanno.[32] Pico accepted the claims of Jewish mystics that the Kabbalah represented an unbroken oral tradition dating back at least to Moses and Mount Sinai. At the young age of 24 he drew up a list of 900 theses, or *conclusiones*, on philosophy, the Kabbalah, magic and theology[33] and challenged anyone to a debate on their merits before a papal audience. In an accompanying *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico defended his bold challenge:

> [I] have dared… to offer a disputation concerning the lofty mysteries of Christian theology, the highest topics of philosophy and unfamiliar branches of knowledge, in so famous a city, before so great an assembly of very learned men, in the presence of the apostolic senate.[34]

The debate never took place, but the effect on contemporary thought was profound. His work stimulated interest in the Kabbalah and

more generally in Hebraic studies throughout Christian Europe. One of Pico's best-known later works, dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, was *Heptaplus*, a sevenfold cosmological commentary on *Genesis*. He insisted that the Kabbalah contained the keys to Hermeticism, but his interest was purely theoretical. Pico never practiced magic, and he denounced the use of astrology for purposes of divination.[35]

Pope Sixtus IV (reigned 1471–1484) is alleged to have supported Kabbalistic studies.[36] But the highest-ranking churchmen to take a direct interest was probably Cardinal Egidio Antonini da Viterbo (c.1465–1532). Egidio was prior-general of the Augustinian Order and, later, Latin patriarch of Constantinople. A humanist scholar, he believed that Hebrew was the only true sacred language and searched the Hebrew scriptures for hidden meanings.[37] Egidio was proficient in several other ancient languages and studied the *Qur'an* in the original Arabic. In 1525 the Venetian Franciscan friar Francesco Giorgi Veneto (1466–1540), also known as Zorzi, wrote the influential book *On the Harmony of the Universe* and dedicated the work to Pope Clement VII. Giorgi's book presented a comprehensive picture of creation, drawing upon Kabbalistic, Hermetic and Platonic concepts.

Germany and Beyond

The study of Jewish esotericism soon spread beyond northern Italy. Johann Reuchlin (1455–1522), one of the first Christian Kabbalists outside Italy, was born at Pforzheim in the Black Forest region of Germany. Reuchlin met Giovanni Pico during a visit to Florence but studied Greek and Hebrew under leading scholars at Basel and Paris. In due course Reuchlin taught at the University of Tübingen, and his reputation attracted students from all parts of the Holy Roman Empire. At the time it was customary for German students to go to Florence for post-graduate studies. Marsilio Ficino paid tribute to the quality of Reuchlin's students: "The German youth who visit the academy of Florence come as well furnished as others leave it." Reuchlin's growing mastery of Kabbalah led to the publication of *De Arte Cabalistica* ("On the Art of the Kabbalah") in 1517.

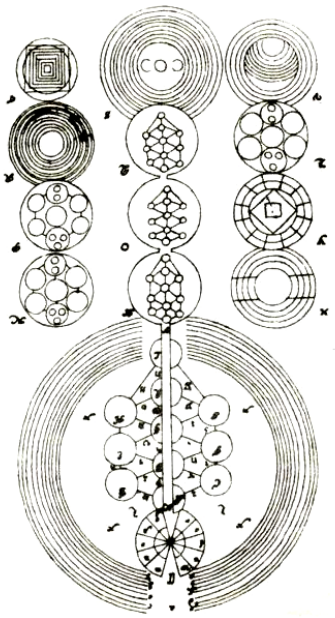
Several prominent Kabbalists were diplomats. The German diplomat, humanist and philologist Johann Albrecht Widmannstetter (1506–1557) had studied at Tübingen. Some of his Kabbalistic writings appeared under the pseudonym "Lucretius." Widmannstetter's close contemporary Guillaume Postel (1510–1581) was a French diplomat and linguist. Sent as an interpreter by King Francis I to the French embassy to the Turkish sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in Constantinople, Postel gathered Eastern manuscripts for the royal library. For many years he worked to translate the *Bahir*, the *Sefer Yetzirah*, and the *Zohar* into Latin, and his translations were finally published in 1552.

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) was a German government official, military strategist, and court physician. He was also a Catholic theologian, philosopher, and occultist. Agrippa was one of the first writers to note similarities between Kabbalistic teachings and Gnosticism, suggesting that the latter was influenced by earlier esoteric Judaism.[38]

None of the individuals mentioned so far benefited from the far-reaching work of the Safed scholars. However the Safed work became available to later Christian Kabbalists, who included several Protestants.[39] One was the Lutheran Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) who was born in Görlitz, Silesia. On Trinity Sunday 1600 he had a spiritual experience that launched him onto a lifelong quest for *gnosis*. Böhme found himself part of a group devoted to the work of the German-Swiss physician and alchemist Paracelsus. Böhme's formal education may have been limited, but he became interested in medicine, the Kabbalah, and the Hermetic arts. He may also have read the works of the Dominican friar Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c.1328) with whom he shared important beliefs. Böhme had little interest in promoting his ideas, and records of his studies were kept mainly for personal reference. The books we have were compiled and published by his followers, in some cases without his knowledge or consent. However several long letters to friends have survived.

Another Protestant Kabbalist was Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1631–1689). Also from Silesia, he was influenced by Böhme. Von Rosenroth studied at the universities of Wittenberg and Leipzig and traveled through Holland, France, and England. He became a respected student of Oriental languages, especially Hebrew. Von Rosenroth planned to prepare a new Latin translation of the *Zohar* but instead published the four-volume *Kabbalah Unveiled* (1678–1684).[40] Among other things it offered a depiction of the Tree of Life that drew heavily on the Safed work (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Von Rosenroth's Tree of Life



Yet another 17th-century German of interest, this time a Jesuit priest, was Athanasius Kirchner (1602–1680). Kirchner studied topics ranging from geology and medicine to Sinology. He also became an early Egyptologist. Those studies persuaded him that Adam and Eve spoke the Egyptian language and that Hermes Trismegistus was none other than the Old Testament Moses. In his *Egyptian Oedipus*, published in 1653, Kirchner reproduced a Tree of Life that closely resembled the one proposed by the Safed scholar Moses Cordovero.

Several other individuals are often cited as Kabbalists of the period, including Paracelsus (1493–1541), John Dee (1527–1608), Robert Fludd (1574–1637), and Thomas Vaughan (1622–1666). Those individuals did indeed occasionally cite classical Kabbalistic texts or the writings of Renaissance Kabbalists, but their primary interest was alchemy or magic. They added little to the Kabbalah as a system of theology and mysticism and in some cases confused their followers as to its true intent. Neoplatonic and Hermetic influence on the Kabbalah and Hermeticism increased as the synthesis of systems of thought increased throughout the Renaissance. Attempts have been made to discern a new field of "Hermetic Kabbalah" but there is scant continuity between it and the medieval Judaic Kabbalah.

Topics of Interest

Judaic Kabbalah was never a unified system of mysticism, occultism or philosophy; the various teachers shared personal insights and perspectives. As in many areas of esotericism, multiple descriptions can be formulated to capture a reality which transcends the rational mind. The most that we find is a distinctive mindset enshrined in classical texts and a set of concepts relating primarily to the cascading emanation of divine force in delicately balanced polarities. Corresponding polarities in the human constitution are implied.

Nor would it be realistic to look for a high degree of coherence within the Christian Kabbalah. Nevertheless certain recurring themes or topics of interest were addressed by prominent western scholars.

Perennial Wisdom

Christian scholars explored the Kabbalah and other ancient esoteric traditions in the hope of discovering the timeless foundations of all world religions. That hope led to an early form of what, today, we would call ecumenism. A number of scholars of the period shared the dream of finding an all-embracing theology that could unify Judaism, Christianity and Islam—perhaps even paganism. Christianity was already viewed as an outgrowth and fulfillment of Judaism, and Islam claimed to be

the fulfillment of both. If indeed the roots of Kabbalah extended back to Abraham, then it might pervade all three Abrahamic religions.

The ecumenical vision had been expressed as early as the 13th century by the Catalan philosopher and mystic, Raymon Lull (1232–c.1316). Although Catalan was by that time predominantly Catholic, Muslims and Jews continued to play important roles in its politics and culture, as they had in Moorish Spain in earlier centuries. Lull identified nine *Dignities*, or *Dignitaries*, which he claimed transcended religious boundaries: *Bonitas* (Goodness), *Magnitudo* (Greatness), *Eternitas* (Eternity), *Potestas* (Power), *Sapientia* (Wisdom), Voluntas (Will), *Virtus* (Virtue), *Veritas* (Truth), and *Gloria* (Glory). Later commentators would correlate these dignitaries with the first nine sefiroth of the Kabbalah.

In the early Renaissance, Giovanni Pico sought to integrate the newly available Kabbalistic and Hermetic teachings with Christianity. Claiming that Christianity was founded largely on Kabbalistic teachings, he stated in one of his theses: "No science can better convince us of the divinity of Jesus Christ than magic and the Kabbalah." Johann Reuchlin also stressed the importance of the Kabbalah, asserting "without it none can achieve something as elusive, as difficult, as the divine."[41]

Egidio Antonini da Viterbo also helped bridge the gap between Christianity and other world religions. Giordano Bruno (1548–1600) was an Italian philosopher, mathematician, astronomer, and occultist. But, rather than trying to bridge any gaps, Bruno antagonized ecclesiastical authorities by his strident claim that his beliefs came from an ancient Egyptian religion, which eclipsed Christianity it importance. He would meet a grim fate for his outspokenness.

Kabbalah and Christian Doctrine

A further motivation for Kabbalistic study was the possibility of adding to Christian knowledge. If the Kabbalah formed part of the perennial wisdom underlying all religions, it might provide new doctrinal insights. In his *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, Pico asserted that the Kabbalah is full of implicitly Christian doctrine. Johann Reuchlin made a similar claim, arguing in his *On the Art of the Kabbalah* that works of Jewish mysticism reflected classical traditions and supported Christian doctrine.

A topic of particular interest to the Renaissance Kabbalists was the trinity. The third-century CE Neoplatonist Plotinus had taught that all manifest reality, including the aspects of the trinity, resulted from emanations from the Godhead. This same doctrine became central to the Kabbalistic theological model: the divine essence, or light, streamed down into the sefiroth from the *Ain Soph*. Dactylus Hebraeus asserted that the first three sefiroth: *Kether*, *Chokmah* and *Binah*, corresponded to the trinity.[42] The 17th-century Christian von Rosenroth and the 18th-century English diarist Ambrose Serle would also explore that correspondence.[43] The three "sefiroth," depicted in Petrus Alphonsi's glyph, mentioned earlier, corresponded to *Chokmah*, *Binah*/*Tabun* and *Daath* which appeared in a passage in *Exodus*.[44]

Plotinus' trinity was hierarchical, and presumably the Christian Kabbalists agreed. Plotinus also asserted that the universe represented a further emanation, below the level of the trinity. Kabbalistic teachings strongly affirmed that principle, declaring that even lowest sefirah, *Malkuth*, was divine. Indeed, Malkuth, which corresponded to our world, was commonly identified with the Shekinah (שכינה), the indwelling presence of God.[45] However official Christian doctrine insisted that the trinitarian persons are co-equal and that the universe was created *ex nihilo*, "from nothing." The universe, according to the church, was certainly not divine; it was corrupt, even evil. Furthermore, official Christianity did not admit the existence of a Godhead distinct from or overshadowing the trinity.[46]

The Dominican friar and scholar Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c.1328) never mentioned the Kabbalah, but he leaned toward the notion of emanation from an undifferentiated Godhead resembling the *Ain Soph*.[47] For that and other teachings he came under suspicion of heresy. However, over the next several centuries, the confluence of Neoplatonic and Kabbalistic

teachings almost guaranteed that other Christian scholars would find similar notions of emanation appealing.

One was Jakob Böhme, who was influenced both by Eckhart and by the Kabbalah. He was fascinated by the passage in *John*: "[T]he light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not,"[48] and he interpreted it to mean that the Godhead is unknowable but immanent. He referred to the Godhead as the *Ungrund*, the "Void."[49] Böhme also argued that the Godhead emanates first as a trinity and then as a septenary, foreshadowing modern esoteric teachings on the seven rays.[50] In the *Sefer Yetzirah*, emanation in Three and then in Seven was related symbolically to the three "mother" letters and seven "double" letters in the Hebrew alphabet.[51] François Mercure van Helmont (1618–1699), physician to the Electress of Pfalz and acquaintance of Gottfried Leibniz, identified the seven lower sefiroth with the Seven Spirits before the Throne mentioned in *Revelation*.[52]

Emergence of the Christian Kabbalah was a tribute to timeless and universal value—theological, cosmological, social and psychological—of its Judaic antecedent. It was also a tribute to the vision of Renaissance scholars who recognized the Kabbalah's potential to describe and explore Christian beliefs about God, the universe, society and the individual.

As noted earlier, Judaic Kabbalists attached considerable importance to the names of God for either mystical or occult purposes. Johann Reuchlin noted that the Hebrew name of Jesus, *Yehoshuah* (יהשוה) was formed by the insertion of the letter *shin* (ש) at the midpoint of the Tetragrammaton, the unutterable name of God. Reuchlin proceeded to suggest that God had revealed himself in three stages, each of which corresponded to a particular divine name. During the world epoch which began with Abraham, God revealed himself through the three-letter name Shaddai (שדי). In the second epoch, ushered in by Moses, he revealed himself through the four-letter Tetragrammaton (יהוה). In the present, messianic epoch, initiated by Jesus Christ, he reveals himself through the five-letter name *Yehoshuah* (יהשוה).[53] By completing the divine name, Jesus fulfilled and extended the Jewish covenant.

Reuchlin noted further that shin is one of the three mother letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It was significant, he argued, that, in the messianic epoch, God had incarnated through a woman. The very name "Jesus" captured in symbolic form the doctrine of the virgin birth. In due course the name of Jesus, long considered of devotional value, took on occult power. The 17th-century Franciscan friar Chrysostomus à Capranica suggested that the emperor Ferdinand II invoke the powerful name *Yehoshuah* to ensure success in a military campaign against the Turks.[54]

Christian Kabbalists identified the sefirah *Tifareth* with Jesus Christ. Just as *Tifareth* served as the mediator between *Kether* and *Malkuth*, Christ was the *Logos*, the restorer of harmony after the fall of Adam.[55] The divine essence poured down on humanity through Christ. In response, we must seek reunion with God through Christ. Humanity might be estranged from God, but it was still potentially divine and capable of a different kind of redemption from the one customarily taught by the church. That alternative view of redemption had much in common with the Eastern Orthodox notion of *theosis*, or "deification." In the west, Meister Eckhart had also found that concept appealing.[56]

Polarities

The power of the Kabbalah to model both the juxtaposition and the resolution of polarities was an evocative concept, and an important polarity was gender. For example, *Tifareth*'s position in the Tree of Life, intermediate be-

tween *Kether* and *Malkuth*/*Shekinah* was entirely consistent with the notion that Christ was born from the Father and the woman.

Guillaume Postel took the notion of gender polarity a stage further by proposing, as some Gnostics had done many centuries earlier, that God manifested in both masculine and feminine form. Over time Postel's belief acquired more than theoretical interest. In 1547 he met a Venetian prophetess named Joanna, whom he believed to be an incarnation of Christ.[57] Postel is quoted as saying: "The Word has been made man, but the world will only be saved when the Word shall be made woman."[58]

The human and cosmic aspects of gender also fascinated Jakob Böhme : "[T]he masculine principle is predominantly anthropomorphic and creative, whereas the feminine principle is predominantly cosmic and birth-giving."[59] Echoing a theory usually attributed to Plato's Aristophanes, Böhme asserted that Adam initially was androgynous and virginal.[60] That virginity was embodied in Sophia: "not a female, but a chasteness and purity without a blemish."[61] Sophia was the direct Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *Chokmah*.[62] Adam lost his primeval virginity through the fall, and Sophia's place was taken by his earthly companion Eve. Thereafter, according to Böhme, man remained in an incomplete state, yearning for his primeval wholeness. The solution lay not in withdrawal into ascetic celibacy, as the church urged, but in a spiritual reunion of the masculine and feminine; through woman man could once again find his primeval Sophia.[63] Masculine-feminine tension might be the source of much suffering, but it provided an environment in which our spiritual potential could be realized.

Another polarity explored in the Kabbalah was good and evil.[64] Kabbalistic teachings took a more sensitive attitude to that polarity than did orthodox Christianity.[65] Kabbalists viewed morality less as an absolute than as a question of balance between pairs of opposites. Certain actions produce imbalance and call for complementary actions to restore balance. For example, severity, represented by the sefirah *Geburah*, needs to be balanced by kindness and generosity, represented by *Chesed*/*Gedulah*; otherwise it harms the actor as well as others. On the other hand, excessive generosity may need to be balanced by prudent withholding of bounty so that recipients can develop a sense of values. The resolution of opposites would be illustrated well in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* by Dame Concord and her twin sons Love and Hate.[66]

Response from Institutional Christianity

Anti-Semitism, never totally absent among medieval Christians, increased in intensity after the First Crusade. Persecution of Jews became common during the Renaissance and the centuries that followed. Jewish Kabbalists faired no better than other Jews. Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia, traveled to Suriano in the hope of meeting Pope Nicholas III who was residing there. Abraham was unaware that orders had been issued to burn him at the stake upon his arrival. Fortunately for him, the pope died that very day. Returning to Rome, Abraham was arrested but was released four weeks later. He died in exile in Malta sometime after 1291.

Christian Kabbalistic studies represented an interest in Judaism that contrasted uneasily with the prevailing anti-Semitism. Despite the involvement of monks, priests, cardinals, and even a pope, the church viewed such studies, Christianized or otherwise, with considerable suspicion, and official responses were ambivalent.

On the one hand there was a sense that interest in Jewish studies might help win Jews to Christianity. As we have seen many Jewish scholars did convert to Christianity,[67] and their expertise was viewed as useful for evangelical and, more importantly, polemical purposes. Converts from Judaism were often appointed to debate religion with practicing Jews, although the "disputations" typically took the form of tribunals targeting the Jewish populations of European cities.[68] Lifelong Christians like Giovanni Pico, Egidio da Viterbo, and Johann Reuchlin, who engaged in serious studies of Judaism could help in similar ways, attempting to undermine Jews' resistance to conversion. On the other, there was fear that

Jewish studies, particularly Kabbalistic studies which impacted on major areas of doctrine, might be a "Trojan horse" that could undermine Christian faith.[69] Christian students of Kabbalah might be tempted to convert to Judaism or persuade others to do so.

Marsilio Ficino's interest in Hermeticism led to accusations of heresy by the church, and he was forced to mount a strong defense of his orthodoxy. His student Giovanni Pico was also questioned by the Inquisition. Despite Pico's assurances that that Neoplatonism and Hermeticism were fully consistent with Christian doctrine, 13 of his *Theses* were condemned as heretical. After fleeing to France, Pico was eventually allowed to return to Florence and was placed in the custody of the Medicis. He died at the early age of 31, poisoned, according to some allegations, by his own secretary. Pico's funeral oration was given by the controversial monk and reformer Girolamo Savonarola.

Johann Reuchlin had dedicated *De Arte Cabalistica* to Pope Leo X. But that gesture did not insulate him from ecclesiastical disfavor. When the inquisitors of Cologne proposed to burn all Jewish books in the Holy Roman Empire, Reuchlin sought to stop them, arguing that the books were a sacred and intellectual heritage. Angered by that opposition, the Inquisition sent Reuchlin to Rome and, despite Cardinal Egidio's support, he was fined for heresy. Later, like Martin Luther, Reuchlin secured the protection of a German prince. Reuchlin supported the Reformation cause, and Philipp Melachthon, Desideratus Erasmus, and Luther all came to him for instruction. He is often referred to as the "Father of the Reformation."

During Cornelius Agrippa's tempestuous career, he was denounced by secular and ecclesiastical authorities throughout Europe and eventually was condemned as a heretic. Among much else, his assertion of links between the Kabbalah and Gnosticism could scarcely be expected to win friends in ecclesiastical circles where the church fathers' diatribes against Gnosticism were often cited. Under pressure from the Inquisition, Agrippa was forced to renounce the study of magic and spent the last years of his life in quiet piety. He died in 1535 in Grenoble, France.

Guillaume Postel's books were placed on the Index of Prohibited Books in 1555. When he appeared before the Inquisition to defend his views, he was judged to be insane rather than heretical. Notwithstanding, he was imprisoned in Rome for four years.[70] Upon release when Pope Paul IV died, he returned to France and continued to preach, only to be placed under house arrest by the Parlement in Paris for disturbing the peace. Postel spent the last eleven years of his life in the monastery of St. Martin des Champs and died there in 1581.

The outspoken Giordano Bruno, whose diplomatic skills never matched his intellectual gifts, became a major target of the institutional church. In a terrible reenactment of the betrayal of Jan Hus by the Council of Constance, Bruno was lured to Rome on a promise of safe conduct and burned at the stake in 1600.[71] More fortunate was the English poet John Donne (1572–1631), yet another man who believed that the Kabbalah offered a way to reconcile Judaism and Christianity.[72] Born a Catholic, he avoided persecution in Elizabethan England by converting to Anglicanism, whereupon he was appointed Dean of St Paul's Cathedral.

Jakob Böhme always considered himself a devout Lutheran, but he was critical of institutional Christianity and its warring sects, comparing them to "Babel and the Antichrist."[73] Böhme's anticlericalism and unconventional theological views drew continual fire from church authorities. Silenced for several years, he began writing again in secrecy. His nemesis, the chief pastor of Görlitz, Gregory Richter, denounced Böhme from the pulpit and inflamed public opinion against him. On his deathbed Böhme is reported to have said "Now I go hence into Paradise."[74] But his grave was desecrated by a mob.

Not surprisingly, the church took a dim view of any attempt to erode the doctrine of evil. To reduce the response to evil to the resolution of pairs of opposites flew in the face of orthodox moral theology and threatened to undermine the power over people's lives that the church derived from belief in sin, judgment and hell.

The Christian Kabbalistic Heritage

Emergence of the Christian Kabbalah was a tribute to the timeless and universal value—theological, cosmological, social and psychological—of its Judaic antecedent. Not insignificantly, that antecedent developed primarily from Sephardic Judaism. Why, one might ask, given what we know of subsequent events, did not medieval Christian Europe provide as fertile an environment as the Muslim world for the development of the Judaic Kabbalah? The answer may lie in the vibrancy of Islamic civilization as much as in the climate of tolerance it fostered.[75]

Nevertheless, Kabbalistic teachings found their way into Christian Europe early in the Renaissance. And great credit is due to the vision of scholars of the time who recognized the Kabbalah's potential to describe and elucidate Christian beliefs about God, the universe, society and the individual. On the other hand, we might note that the Christian Kabbalah differed from its medieval Judaic antecedent in its almost-complete dependence on written texts rather than the oral tradition of generations of rabbinic teachers. To that extent, use of the very term "Kabbalah" becomes questionable.

Be that as it may, if we look for a man whose contribution to the Christian Kabbalah was pivotal, he would have to be Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In addition to popularizing the study of Hebraic texts, which would broaden the focus of Christian scholarship beyond what it had been in medieval times, he gave Kabbalistic studies legitimacy in Christian circles. Furthermore, he promoted the view that, by use of the intellect, man could ascend the chain of being—or perhaps we should say the Tree of Life—and approach the angelic realm, even the divine realm. Neglect of the intellect, by contrast, reduced man to a vegetative or animal level.

Despite the enthusiasm of Pico and the other scholars we have discussed, the Christian Kabbalah never became part of mainstream Christianity beliefs or practices. Interest was confined to a handful of intellectuals, mystics, and eccentric churchmen. Ironically, the synthesis of Kabbalah and Hermeticism, which helped generate interest in the Kabbalah early in the Renaissance, discredited it in the eyes of ecclesiastical authorities and increased suspicious of anything with occult associations. Many leading scholars were persecuted or even executed for their involvement.

Nor was the contribution of leading Christian Kabbalists always recognized in their own time. Jakob Böhme's importance was only acknowledged several decades after his death, when his work inspired the Philadelphian Society, an esoteric group formed in England in 1670.[76] Eventually Böhme's work would influence Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831)[77] and psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961). Böhme was also held in high regard in 19th-century Russia, where mystics and even ordinary people referred to him as "the holy Jakob Böhme among our fathers."[78]

In England Kabbalistic teachings influenced the Cambridge Platonists, a group of academic theologians that included Benjamin Whichcote (1609–1683), Henry More (1614–1687), and Countess Anne Conway (1630–1679). In turn, their work as well as Böhme's influenced the artist and writer William Blake (1757–1827).[79]

In France, esoteric studies continued in the Martinist movement, named after Louis Claude de Saint-Martin (1743–1803). Saint-Martin and his teacher, Martinez de Pasqually were both influenced by Kabbalism. An interesting insight shared by the Martinists was Christ's role as the "repairer" of humanity. Their perspective on redemption echoed the Safed Kabbalists' assertion that God had to repair the world after the primeval catastrophe.[80] On the other hand, Christianity was lukewarm to suggestions that humanity might participate in the redemptive act; indeed the Protestant reformers insisted that man is totally dependent on divine grace for salvation.[81]

The early 17th-century Rosicrucian movement was influenced by both Kabbalistic and Hermetic teachings. In turn, Rosicrucianism influenced Freemasonry and 19th-century occultism. French occultism eventually blossomed in the work of Éliphas Levi and Papus, while the most visible expression of British

occultism was the Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn.[82]

Meanwhile, interest in the Kabbalistic study declined in Jewish circles. An important reason was its association with the Sabbatean fiasco. In the 1660s, the charismatic but psychologically unstable Sabbatai Zevi (1626–1676) proclaimed himself the messiah and attracted popular support throughout the Jewish world. Zevi himself had no particular leanings toward the Kabbalah, but a leading supporter, Nathan of Gaza, used Kabbalistic teachings to bolster Zevi's claims. When Zevi converted to Islam to escape execution by the Turkish sultan, the movement collapsed.[83] The Judaic Kabbalah was tainted, and serious study remained muted until the 20th century.

A more general reason for the decline in Judaic Kabbalah was a perception on the part of rabbinic scholars that the Kabbalah had become contaminated by Hermeticism and "Christianized." In particular, efforts based on Kabbalistic concepts to synthesize Jewish and Christian thought were opposed as strongly by Jewish authorities as by Christian ecclesiastical authorities.

However the work of Christian Kabbalists was not totally rejected. That of the German philosopher Franz Josef Molitor (1779–1860) has won admiration from Jewish historians. The prominent Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem judged his work to be "far superior to that of most Jewish scholars of his time."[84] Of German birth, Scholem emigrated to Jerusalem before World War II.[85] More than any other individual, he was responsible for the revival of interest in the Kabbalah in Jewish circles. Now a broadly based Kabbalistic revival is in progress in Israel, the United States, and elsewhere.

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1 "Sephardic" refers to Judaic traditions that developed within the Muslim Empire from the seventh century onward. It contrasts with Ashkenazic Judaism that developed in Christian Germany and later spread to eastern Europe.

2 See for example: Dion Fortune. *The Mystical Qabalah*, revised edition. Weiser Books, 1935. Arthur E. Waite. *The Holy Kabbalah*. Citadel Press, (undated, 1929?). Gershom Scholem. *Kabbalah*. Meridian Books, 1974. Leonora Leet. *The Secret Doctrine of the Kabbalah*. Inner Traditions, 1999.

3 Alternative forms are "Qabalah," the more direct transliteration of the Hebrew, and the Latinized "Cabala." This last was often used in connection with the Christian Kabbalah.

4 The term "metaphysics" was actually coined by Aristotle, who did not form part of that tradition; however the term is a convenient shorthand for the mystically oriented philosophy that stretched from Pythagoras to the third-century CE Neoplatonists.

5 The origins of all three books are disputed. Legends trace the books back to the first centuries of the Common Era, while secular academics typically attribute authorship to Isaac the Blind and Moses of Leon themselves. Controversy over the authorship of the *Zohar* existed even during Moses de Leon's lifetime.

6 *Sefirah* has three roots: *sefer* (ספר, "text"), *sefar* (ספר, "number"), and *sippur* (סיפור,"telling"). See: Aryeh Kaplan. *Sefer Yetzirah: the Book of Creation.* Weiser, 1997, pp. 19-20.

7 The *Ain Soph* can be compared with the Hindu Brahman. In more detail, the Godhead was said to be hidden by three "veils," the *Ain* (אין, "Ultimate"), the *Ain Soph* (אין סוף, "Limitless"), and the *Ain Soph Aur* (אין סוף אור, "Infinite Light").

8 The sefirothic names were common Hebrew words, and all are found—occasionally in evocative combinations suggesting early knowledge of Kabbalistic symbolism—in the Hebrew Bible. See for example: *1 Chronicles* 29:11; *Proverbs* 2:2-6; and *Proverbs* 9:10.

9 Magic was practiced among the *Chasidim* of 12th- and 13th-century Germany. And a number of Italian Jews became interested in magic in the 15th century. The rabbi Meir ibn Gabbay (1480–c.1540) emerged as a leading theurgic Kabbalist in Turkey. See for example: Moshe Idel. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. Yale Univ. Press, 1988, pp. 175ff.

10 Shimon bar Yockai is often claimed to have dictated the *Zohar* to a student while hiding in a cave after being condemned to death by Roman authorities.

11 See for example, Raphael Afilalo (ed.). *The Kabbalah of the Ari Z'al according to the Ramhal*. Kabbalah Editions, 2004, pp. 41-58.

[12] For a discussion of participation in the creative and redemptive acts, see: Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 173-181.

[13] Parts of the *Zohar* were written in Aramaic. This was a language not generally spoken in medieval Europe, lending support to claims that the texts were written in the first–third centuries CE. However Syriac, the sacred and scholarly language of Persia, was closely related to Aramaic, and the early Kabbalistic texts likely were brought from Baghdad.

[14] Some Jews never returned from Babylon after the exile. Many more Jews left Palestine during times of turbulence, particularly during Roman rule in the first and second centuries CE. Migrations continued throughout the late Middle Ages as the result of persecution, culminating in the mass deportation of Jews from Spain in 1492 and Portugal in 1497. By the 1500, few Jews remained in western Europe.

[15] Gematria attaches numerical values to words and phrases and seeks meaningful correspondences with words and phrases with arithmetically related values.

[16] The *Tetragrammaton* ("name of four letters") is conventionally rendered *Yahweh* or *Jehovah*, but its correct pronunciation is unknown. Only the high priest of biblical Jewish was permitted to utter the name, and then only once a year, at Yom Kippur.

[17] Abulafia is remembered for his prophetic text, the *Sefer ha-Yashar* ("Book of the Righteous").

[18] An estimated one-third of the Jewish population of Spain converted, often in the attempt to avoid ongoing harassment by Christian authorities.

[19] Constantinople was conquered by the Fourth Crusade, in 1204, and Latin bishops appointed to the eastern patriarchate. The Byzantines regained control of Constantinople in mid-century, but the empire was mortally wounded and Constantinople fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

[20] *The Kybalion*. Yogi Publication Society, 1912, p .17.

[21] According to some legends Thoth was a contemporary of Abraham, even his teacher.

[22] The famous quote appeared in a book by Antonio Averlino Filarete published between 1441 and 1464. See: Vincent Cronin. "Florence of the Medici." *The Renaissance: Maker of Modern Man*. National Geographic, 1970, p. 79.

[23] G. F. Young. *The Medici*. Modern Library, 1910/1930, pp. 197-198.

[24] Myron P. Gilmore. *The World of Humanism*. Harper, 1962, p. 185.

[25] An agreement was reached, and the patriarch of Constantinople endorsed it. But the agreement was widely viewed as a sellout to western Christianity, and the Orthodox laity and most of the clergy rejected it. When the city of Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, many people viewed the conquest as punishment for the patriarch's "betrayal" of his church.

[26] See for example: Christopher Bamford. Introduction to *"Freemasonry" and Ritual Work*. Steinerbooks, 2007, p. xxxvi-xxxvii.

[27] For a discussion of some of the Academy's activities see: Désirée Hirst. *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake*. Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964, pp. 15-43.

[28] Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, pp. 16-18.

[29] Young, *The Medici*, p. 109.

[30] Pico boldly claimed: "I have ranged through all the masters of philosophy, examined all their works, become acquainted with all schools." *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, 1486. (Transl: Elizabeth L. Forbes.) Ernst Cassirer. *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*. University Of Chicago Press, 1948

[31] Young, *The Medici*, p. 203.

[32] Alamanno's involvement in magic shows that such interests were not confined to Christian Kabbalists in 15th-century Italy.

[33] The theses were published in Rome in 1486 as the *Conclusiones Philosophicae, Cabalasticae et Theologicae*. Judgments on how many dealt with the Kabbalah vary from 47 to 138. See: Richard H. Popkin. *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Springer, 1994, p. 18.

[34] Pico, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, p. 239.

[35] *Disputationes Adversus Astrologiam Divinatricem* ("Disputations against Divinatory Astrology.")

[36] Athol Bloomer. "The Eucharist and the Jewish Mystical Tradition, Part I." *The Hebrew Catholic*, Summer-Fall 2002, pp. 15-18.

[37] Diarmaid MacCullough. *The Reformation*. Penguin Books, 2003, p. 91. See also: John O'Malley. "Historical Thought and the Reform Crisis of the Early Sixteenth Century." *Theological Studies*, vol. 28, 1967, pp. 531-548.

[38] Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 5-6.

[39] Dissemination of Kabbalistic texts at that time was aided by invention of the printing press.

[40] *The Kabbalah Unveiled* was translated into English by S. L. Macgregor Mathers, co-founder of the Society of the Golden Dawn, and published in 1888.

[41] Introduction to Johann Reuchlin. *On the Art of the Kabbalah*. (Transl: Martin Goodman & Sarah Goodman.) Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1993, p. 18.

[42] Richard H. Popkin. *Jewish Christians and Christian Jews: from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*. Springer, 1994, p. 17.

[43] Ambrose Serle. *Essays Upon Some Remarkable Names and Titles of Jesus Christ*, 1799. Quoted in: Hirst. *Hidden Riches*, pp. 282-283. A trinity can be extracted from the tree of life in more than one way, all of them revealing important correspondences, but none completely satisfying in its symbolism. See: John Nash. "The Trinity and Its Symbolism." *Esoteric Quarterly*, Spring 2005, pp. 33-46.

[44] In *Exodus* 31:3 the Lord said "I have filled him with the spirit of God, in wisdom [chokmah], and in understanding [*tabun*], and in knowledge [*daath*]."

[45] For a discussion of the Shekinah's role in Jewish mysticism see: John Nash. "The Shekinah: the Indwelling Glory of God." *Esoteric Quarterly*, Summer 2005, pp. 33-40.

[46] In Christian theology God the Father plays the *de-facto* role of a Godhead, with the unfortunate implication that the highest level of divinity is male.

[47] Meister Eckhart. Sermon 5: *How All Creatures*. Matthew Fox (ed.). *Passion for Creation*. Inner Traditions, 1980/2000, p. 93.

[48] *John* 1:5.

[49] A similar notion was promoted by the 20th-century Protestant theologian Paul Tillich.

[50] Jakob Böhme. *Four Tables of Divine Revelation*. London, 1654. Robin Waterfield (ed.). *Jacob Boehme*. North Atlantic Books, 2001, pp. 214-217.

[51] *Sefer Yetzirah* 1:10. See for example, Aryeh Kaplan. *Sefer Yetzirah: the Book of Creation*. Weiser, 1997, pp. 7, 250-254, 262. The remaining twelve "single" letters correspond to the next stage of differentiation discussed in the esoteric literature: the 12 signs of the zodiac. The increasing complexity of manifestation is represented by the series: $1 \rightarrow 3 \rightarrow 7 \rightarrow 12$... Note that $7 = 3 + 4$, while $12 = 3 \times 4$.

[52] *Revelation* 1:4.

[53] Reuchlin's arguments were presented in his book *De Verbo Mirifico* ("On the Miraculous Word"). See, for example: Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 198. Also, see the Introduction to *On the Art of the Kabbalah* by Martin Goodman & Sarah Goodman. Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1993, pp. xix-xxi.

[54] Ken Gewertz. "Mystical Encounters." *Harvard Gazette Archives*, March 1996.

[55] It should be noted that originally *Logos* connoted "mediator" or "bringer of harmony." Interpretation as "the Word" was a late development, popularized by the 17th-century King James Bible.

[56] Eckhart, Sermon 5, p. 93.

[57] Yvonne Petry. *Gender, Kabbalah, and the Reformation*. Brill 2004, pp. 5ff.

[58] Éliphas Levi. *History of Magic*. (Transl: A. E. Waite.) Weiser, 1913/1969), p. 253.

[59] Jakob Böhme. *The Threefold Life of Man*. (Transl: S. Janos.) Quoted in: N. Berdyaev. *Studies Concerning Jacob Boehme*, etude II, 1930, pp. 34-62.

[60] In Plato's *Symposium* Aristophanes declared that man was originally androgynous but was cut in two by Zeus to curb his pride. Ever since, man has sought his female half, and vice versa.

[61] Böhme, *The Threefold Life of Man*, pp. 34-62. See also Böhme's *Mysterium Magnum*. London, 1654, chapter 18.

[62] "Chokmah" was a feminine Hebrew noun, and in Hellenic Jewish mysticism *Chokmah*/*Sophia* ("Wisdom") was regarded as a feminine divine entity. In the Kabbalah, *Chokmah* became a masculine force.

[63] For a discussion of Böhme's teachings on gender and their influence on William Blake see: Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, pp. 92-96.

[64] For a discussion of the pairs of opposites as they are addressed in the Kabbalah see: John Nash. "Duality, Good and Evil, and the Approach to Harmony." *Esoteric Quarterly*, Fall 2004, pp. 15-26.

[65] Nash. "Duality, Good and Evil, and the Approach to Harmony," pp. 15-26.

[66] Edmund Spenser. *The Faerie Queene*, Book VI, canto 10. London, 1596.

[67] In some cases conversion was voluntary, but in many instances it was coerced, as occurred in 15th-century Spain.

[68] Major disputations took place in Paris and Barcelona.

[69] Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, pp. 110-111.

[70] Yvonne Petry. *Gender, Kabbalah, and the Reformation*. Brill 2004, p.7.

[71] Such treachery was not uncommon at the time. Martin Luther narrowly escaped a similar fate at the Diet of Worms in 1521. Not surprisingly, Galileo entered into a plea bargain with the Inquisition rather than risk further investigation.

[72] See the discussion in Hirst, *Hidden Riches*, pp. 110-111.

[73] Quoted in: Waterfield. *Jacob Boehme*, pp. 154-155. Source not provided.

[74] John J. Stoudt. *Sunrise to Eternity*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957, p. 191.

[75] It must not be forgotten that the golden age of Islamic culture occurred while most of Christian Europe was still mired in the Dark Ages.

[76] Prominent members of the Philadelphians were Anglican priest John Pordage (1607–1681) and Jane Ward Lead (1624–1704) who had a number of visions involving Sophia.

[77] It is easy to see how Böhme's resolution of opposites fed into Hegel's theory of thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

[78] Nikolai Berdyaev. *The Russian Idea*. (Transl: R. French.) Lindisfarne Press, 1947/1992, p. 37.

[79] For an extended discussion of the Cambridge Platonists and their influence on Blake see: Hirst, *Hidden Riches*.

[80] See note 20.

[81] The Calvinists went so far as to insist that humankind was totally depraved and, even Christ's atonement could only rescue a small elite, or "elect," from eternal damnation.

[82] For perspectives on the Society of the Golden Dawn see: Israel Regardie. *The Golden Dawn*. Llewellyn Publications, 1982. See also: Mary K. Greer. *Women of the Golden Dawn*. Park Street Press, 1995.

[83] See the extensive account of Zevi and the movement in Gershom Scholem. *Kabbalah*, pp. 244-286. See also his *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Schoken Books, 1946, pp.287-324.

[84] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 201.

[85] Important works by Gershom Scholem, including *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* and *Kabbalah*, have already been cited.

Appendix 1. Sefiroth in the Judaic Kabbalah*

No.	Hebrew Name		Conventional English Name
1	Kether	כתר	"Crown"
2	Chokmah	חכמה	"Wisdom"
3	Binah or Tabun	בינה תבון	"Understanding" or "Intelligence"
--	Daath	דעת	"Knowledge" or "Gnosis"
4	Chesed, or *Gedulah*	חסד גדולה	"Mercy" or "Greatness"
5	Geburah, or Din	גבורה דין	"Judgment" or "Severity"
6	Tifareth	תפארת	"Beauty" or "Harmony"
7	Netzach	נצח	"Victory" or "Eternity"
8	Hod	הוד	"Splendor"
9	Yesod	יסוד	"Foundation"
10	Malkuth or Shekinah	מלכות שכינה	"The Kingdom" or "The Indwelling Presence of God"

* Kabbalists insist that the English names are just convenient labels and that the true nature of the sefiroth is deeper and more complex.