

THE CHRISTIAN USE OF JEWISH NUMEROLOGY

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A book called the Zohar emerged during the Middle Ages, giving rise to a Jewish form of mystical speculation known as the "Cabala" and creating strong interest in the system's mystical teachings in both Jewish and Christian circles. During the Renaissance, Pico, Reuchlin, and Ricci led in applying the Zohar's mystical teachings to the OT in defense of Christian doctrines such as that of the Trinity. The Cabalistic doctrine of emanations provided a solution to the tension between the doctrines of God's transcendence and His immanence. Another exegetical method of the Cabalists was gematria, a system for discovering secret truths from the OT through various techniques of assigning numerical value to letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Christians should resist the temptation of using Cabalistic means for discovering truth from the Bible, because it deviates so widely from the grammatical-historical method of exegesis.

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Around A.D. 1300, a Hebrew book entitled the *Zohar* began circulating in Spain and its adjoining countries. The *Zohar*, a Hebrew term for "brilliance," was basically a mystical commentary on the Torah attributed to the second-century rabbi, Shimon bar Yochai. Late research has demonstrated conclusively that the real author was a contemporary Spanish rabbi named Moses de Leon.¹ The philosophical theology of the *Zohar* constituted a decisive stage in the development of the Jewish form of mystical speculation known as the "Cabala."

¹Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961) 156-204.

From the emergence of the *Zohar* to the rise of the "Haskala" (the Jewish Enlightenment) over four hundred years later, the Cabala² was the most influential mold of Jewish thought. Although never espoused by all and always opposed by some, this mystical theosophy in attempting to explain the true relationship between God and creation influenced the mind of every Jewish person. It is safe to say that during the period following the Spanish expulsion in 1492, the *Zohar* ranked next to the Bible and the Talmud in spiritual authority for the Jewish community.

Furthermore, Jewish mystical writings did not escape the notice of non-Jewish thinkers. Many Christian theologians ridiculed the Cabala as occultic and fanciful. At the end of the fifteenth century, however, a movement began to develop in certain Renaissance "Christian" circles that sought to harmonize the doctrines of the Cabala with Christianity. Christian writers attempted to show that the true meaning of Cabalistic mysticism actually promoted the teaching of Christian doctrines!

The twofold purpose of this essay is to explain the main points of Christian interpretations of the Cabala and to examine the Cabala's influence on some modern evangelical thought.

RENAISSANCE CABALISTS

²I.e., "a medieval and modern system of Jewish theosophy, mysticism, and thaumaturgy marked by belief in creation through emanation and a cipher method of interpreting Scripture" (10th ed., *Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* 158).

All attempts to discover a Christian interpretation of the Cabala before the late fifteenth century have failed. Everyone agrees that the founder of this approach was the Florentine prodigy Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-94).³ Pico evidently had a portion of Cabalistic literature translated into Latin for him by the convert Samuel ben Nissim Abulfaraj, later known as Flavius Mithridates. The major source for Pico's Cabalistic conclusions was a Bible commentary by Menachem Recanati.⁴ Recanati's commentary was basically a watered-down version of the *Zohar*, which itself was a commentary on the Pentateuch.

In 1486 Pico displayed 900 theses for public debate in Rome. Included among these were 47 propositions taken directly from Cabalistic sources plus 72 more propositions that represented his own conclusions from his Cabalistic research. Pico himself announced that his work was "derived from the fundamental ideas of the Hebrew sages, greatly strengthening the Christian religion."⁵ The theses contained the daring claim that "no science can better convince us of the divinity of Jesus Christ than magic and Cabala."⁶ Pico, therefore, claimed that he could prove the dogmas of the Trinity and the Incarnation of Jesus Christ on the basis of Cabalistic axioms. This sudden discovery of a "secret tradition" hitherto unknown caused a sensation in the Christian intellectual world and aroused the fierce opposition of ecclesiastical authorities. To defend himself, Pico composed his *Apologia* and dedicated it to Lorenzo de Medici. This was not sufficient for the authorities, and he was declared guilty of heresy, but was cleared after a special appeal had gained the pardon of the pope.

Although tradition views Pico as the founder of "Christian Cabala," an examination of his "conclusions" reveals a rather incoherent and unsystematic approach to the subject. He does not discuss the precise schematization of the *sefirot*,⁷ he equates single terms from one system to another (e.g., he makes "night" in the Orphic system the same as *En Soph*⁸ in Cabala), and his suggestions regarding number symbolism are

³Gershom Scholem, *Kaballah* (New York: Dorset, 1974) 197.

⁴Scholem (*Kaballah* 63) mentions the title of Recanati's work as *According to the Path of Truth* (Venice, 1523).

⁵Joseph Leon Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University, 1944) 20.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷Scholem defines the *sefirot* as "spheres, whole realms of divinity, which underlie the world of our sense data and which are present and active in all that exists" (*Major Trends* 11).

⁸Literally translated as "The One Without End," *En Soph* (also spelled *En Sof*) is the technical Cabalistic title for God.

inconsistent and haphazard. Pico's successors had to clarify and systematize his original suggestions.

John Reuchlin (1455-1522) is known in Jewish and Christian history for his eloquent defense of Hebrew literature against Pfefforkorn and the Dominicans. To Reuchlin himself, however, those contributions were phases of his interest in the Cabala. Although Reuchlin cited Pico as his inspiration, the Jewish cabalist Joseph Gikatilla (*Shaare Orah*⁹) was the source for his knowledge of Cabala. Reuchlin's work *De Arte Cabalistica*¹⁰ (1517), reveals a well-thought out theoretical approach building on and extending Pico's scattered ideas. Reuchlin's main contribution was a series of bold speculations on the names of God which "proved" or illustrated the Incarnation. Human history, Reuchlin argued, divides into three periods.¹¹ In the first, a natural period, God revealed Himself to the Patriarchs through the three-lettered name of "Shaddai" (**ydv**, \$ dy). In the period of the Torah, He revealed Himself to Moses through the four-lettered name of the Tetragrammaton (**hwhy**, yhwh). In the period of redemption He revealed Himself through five letters: the Tetragrammaton with the addition of the letter *shin*, thus spelling "Yehoshuah" (**hvwshy**, yhw\$h) or "Jesus." Thus Reuchlin's arrangement was able to combine the Jewish belief in three ages (that of the Chaos, that of the Torah, and that of the Messiah) with the tripartite Christian division of a reign of the Father, a reign of the Son, and a reign of the Holy Spirit. Whatever be the merits of Reuchlin's interpretations, from his time on, no Christian writer who touched on Cabalism did so without using him as a source. "That the Christian Cabala was at all respectable is attributable to the respect in which Reuchlin's work was held."¹²

During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries a wave of conversions to Christianity induced by the Cabala took place among the Jews. Certainly the most distinguished of these Cabalistic converts was Paul Ricci, who after his conversion became physician to Maximilian I and in 1521 became professor of Greek and Hebrew in the University of Pavia.¹³ His main work was the lengthy dialogue *De Coelesti Agricultura* (1541; Eng., "Concerning the Agriculture of the Heavens") in four books. He also produced a translation of Gikatilla's *Shaare Orah*. Ricci unified the scattered dogmas of the Christian Cabala into an internally consistent system. Elaborate exegetical devices, however, as well as number and letter permutations did not appear in his work. Ricci's system proceeded

⁹*Gates of Light*, circa 1293, mentioned by Scholem, *Kaballah* 195.

¹⁰Johann Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabala* (New York: Abaris, 1983).

¹¹*Ibid.*, 2.

¹²Blau, *Christian Interpretation of the Cabala* 60.

¹³"Ricius, Paulus," *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971) 14:163.

from Adam's original innocence and knowledge of all ten sefirot, through the Fall and its consequence, the loss of knowledge of the three highest sefirot, to the conversion and redemption of man at the second advent of Jesus. The Christian interpretation of Cabala reached its apex of theological sophistication in the writings of Ricci.

Although many other Christians wrote about the Cabala, continuing to the eighteenth century, these three "founders"—Pico, Reuchlin, and Ricci—laid the groundwork for all later Christological speculation on the Cabala.

IDEAS AND METHODS

All Cabalistic discussions about the relationship between God and man revolved around the tensions created by the doctrines of God's transcendence and /or immanence.¹⁴ Isaiah's conception of Deity combines both truths in a graphic way:

For thus says the high and exalted One Who lives forever, whose name is Holy, "I dwell *on* a high and holy place, and *also* with the contrite and lowly of spirit in order to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Isa 57:15, NASB).

Isaiah answers the question of whether God is very distant from man (transcendence) or very close to man (immanence) by stating that the lofty God is close to the meek. Therefore, the OT notion is clearly one of immanence. However, under the influence of Alexandria (Hellenistic Judaism), the notion of transcendence came strongly to the forefront. The contradiction between a transcendent God and an immanent God demanded a resolution. An emanation doctrine seemed to provide a way to escape the horns of that dilemma. Philo was a well-known exponent of one type of an emanation theory. The sefirot of Cabalism provided another. The sefirot reveal God to the earnest seeker through increasingly exalted attributes, but they also are intermediaries by means of which God's intervention in human affairs took place. Therefore, the transcendent conception of deity held by Jewish Cabalists made it easier for them to accept the view of God presented in the NT. It was not difficult to substitute Christ for the sefirot as a means of explaining God's nature.¹⁵

But how exactly did Christ fit into the sefirot scheme? The ten sefirot fell into two divisions: an upper three and a lower seven. The upper three are those most closely associated with *En Sof*, the ineffable God. The lower seven are the ones most closely associated with the lower

¹⁴Scholem, *Major Trends* 55.

¹⁵Christian David Ginsburg, *The Kaballah* (New York: Macmillan, 1956) 138-44.

creation, i.e., the world of *asiah* ("creation"). The first sefira, the one at the top of the schematic tree of the sefirot, was Keter, "crown."¹⁶ This was the Father. Ricci also associated the name of God, *Ehyeh* ("I am"), with this sefira.¹⁷ The second, *chochmah* ("wisdom"), was associated with the Son, the Second Person of the Trinity. Ricci also associated the divine name *Yah (hy)* with this sefira. The masculine sefirot on this side of the schema also served to underscore the identification of *chochmah* as the Son. The third sefira, *binah* ("understanding"), corresponded to the Spirit of God. Ricci associated *elohim* with this sefira and emphasized the feminine characteristics of that side of the schema. Thus, the upper three form a triad answering to the Holy Trinity. This use of the upper triad of the sefirotic tree to teach the Trinity was a common denominator among all Christian interpreters of the Cabala.¹⁸

Another exegetical method employed by the Christian Cabalists was *gematria*. Since it was believed that Hebrew was the original language, then the very letters of the language must have contained certain divine messages for the readers. One of the Cabalistic books familiar to Pico, et. al., was the *Sefer Yetsirah* ("Book of Formation").¹⁹ At its very beginning *Sefer Yetsirah* presents a theory of creation in which the letters play an active part:

By means of thirty-two mysterious paths of wisdom (i.e., the twenty two letters plus the ten sefirot) did the Lord of hosts ordain to create His Universe. The twenty two fundamental letters God appointed, established, combined, weighed, and changed, and through them He formed all things existent and destined to exist.²⁰

The term *gematria* was used in the Middle Ages to describe all the practices of numerical equivalencies, transformations, and permutations involving the Hebrew letters. In later times three terms developed to describe three different kinds of numerical methods. *Gematria* is the process of creating equivalencies from the numerical values of words. It is based on the fact that many ancient languages used the letters of the alphabet to represent numbers. *Notarikon* is an acrostic system. The initial or final letters of the words in a phrase are joined to form a word which is then given occult significance. *Themurah* consists of transposing the letters of a word, or replacing them with artificial equivalents obtained from one or another of

¹⁶Ibid., 89.

¹⁷"Ricius, Paulus" 165.

¹⁸Ibid.; Ginsburg, *Kaballah* 143.

¹⁹Latin translation *Liber Iezira*, ed. John Rittangelius (Amsterdam, 1642).

²⁰Ibid., 1:1.

a group of anagrams.²¹

In his work *On the Art of Cabala*, Reuchlin furnishes an example of how *gematria* was employed to affirm Christian doctrine. The Cabalists constantly experimented with the divine name YHVH (**hwby**) to produce all kinds of secret "truths." The numerical value of the name is forty-two: yud (10, 6, 4), y (5), vv (6, 6) h (5). From this flowed the forty-two letter name: *Ab Elohim Ben Elohim Ruach Hakadosh Elohim Shelosha Beachad Achad Beshelosha*, that is, "The Father is God, the Son is God, the Holy Spirit is God; Three in One and One in Three."²²

Another of Reuchlin's "evidences" of the Trinity is in the very first verse of the Bible. Taking each of the three letters composing the word "created" ('**rb**, *br@*) as the initial of a separate word results in the expression **b' iwr**, **b** (*bn rwh nb*), "Son, Spirit, Father." Furthermore, the word "stone" (**b'**, *@b*) in Ps 118:22 can be divided into "Father, Son" (**, b b'**, *@b bn*).²³ Such methodology could prove or "illustrate" almost any doctrine. Those "proofs" for the Messiahship of Jesus bring no honor to Christianity and reflect badly against the one who uses them as well as the one convinced by them.

In addition to the parallels from the sefirot and the use of *gematria*, Christian interpreters of the Cabala have used one other "evangelistic" method—statements in the *Zohar* that seemingly imply trinitarianism. Although Pico and other founders did not utilize these statements (due to their unfamiliarity with the text of the *Zohar*), some have taken the following passages as clearly conveying that Jewish Cabalists affirmed the concept of plurality within the Godhead.

In commenting on the repetition of the Divine names YHVH, Elohenu, and YHVH in Deuteronomy 6:4, the Zoharic author asks,

How can the three Names be one? Only through the perception of faith: in the vision of the Holy Spirit, in the beholding of the hidden eyes alone. The mystery of the audible voice is similar to this, for though it is one yet it consists of three elements—firs, air, and water, which have, however, become one in the mystery of the voice. Even so it is with the mystery of the threefold Divine manifestations designated by YHVH Elohenu YHVH—three modes which yet form one unity.²⁴

After citing this and other Zoharic passages identifying the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 with the Messiah, Ginsburg comments,

²¹Scholem, *Major Trends* 100.

²²Reuchlin, *Art of the Kabala* 28.

²³Johann Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico* (Basel, 1494).

²⁴*Zohar*, II, 43b.

That these opinions favor, to a certain extent, the doctrines of the Trinity and the Atonement, though not in the orthodox sense, is not only admitted by many of the Jewish literati who are adverse to the Kabbalah, but by some of its friends. Indeed, the very fact that so large a number of Kabbalists have from time to time embraced the Christian faith would of itself show that there must be some sort of affinity between the tenets of the respective systems.²⁵

That an affinity existed between the theosophical beliefs of medieval Cabalists and Christianity cannot be reasonably doubted—that it was the intention of the Cabalists that the affinity justified Trinitarian views is another matter altogether.

CHRISTIAN CABALISTS TODAY?

The Cabala does not command the allegiance of most Jews today, but is confined mainly to the Hasidim. Has a remnant of "Christian Cabalists" likewise survived to the present? One looks in vain for a Christian interpreter who attempts to find evidence of the Trinity in the upper triad of the sefirotic schema, as did Pico and his successors. However, some evangelical writers still employ familiar Cabalistic hermeneutical methodology.

At the turn of the twentieth century an Anglican clergyman named E. W. Bullinger produced some voluminous writings that have influenced many evangelicals at the beginning of the twenty-first century. His book *Number in Scripture* is a thorough discussion of the spiritual significance of numbers throughout the Bible.²⁶ Although containing some very useful material about the symbolic character of certain numbers such as 3, 7, and 40, the book lists over fifty numbers that convey hidden spiritual truth to the reader! Bullinger, however, uses numbers to establish authorship of books of the Bible. Consider the following argument for the Pauline authorship of Hebrews:

The New Testament contains 27 separate books (3 x 3 x 3 or 3³). Of these 27 books, 21 (3 x 7) are Epistles. Of the 21 Epistles of the NT, 14 (2 x 7) are by Paul, and seven by other writers. In this lies an argument for the Pauline authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Without it the Epistles of Paul are only *thirteen* in number, with it they are 14 (2 x 7).²⁷

Furthermore, Bullinger could not comprehend how Paul could write

²⁵Ginsburg, *The Kaballah* 142-43.

²⁶E. W. Bullinger, *Number in Scripture* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1969).

²⁷*Ibid.*, 41.

thirteen epistles because that number had evil connotations:

As to the significance of thirteen, all are aware that it has come down to us as a number of ill-omen. Many superstitions cluster around it, and various explanations are current concerning them. Unfortunately, those who go backwards to find a reason seldom go back far enough. The popular explanations do not, so far as we are aware, go further back than the Apostles. But we must go back to the first occurrence of the number thirteen in order to discover the key to its significance. It occurs first in Gen. xiv. 4, where we read 'Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and the thirteenth year they REBELLED.' Hence every occurrence of the number thirteen, and likewise of every multiple of it, stamps that with which it stands in connection with rebellion, apostasy, defection, corruption, disintegration, revolution, or some kindred idea.²⁸

Another writer on "numerics" popular among some evangelicals is Ivan Panin. Panin's elaborate system of "Bible Numerics" actually attempted to establish the true text of the NT.²⁹

The real problem with this and all methods of *gematria* is that one receives from their use just what he puts into them. The possible number of permutations is endless, particularly when dividing numerical totals into factors! For example, consider Panin's treatment of Gen 1:1:

The numeric value of the first word of this verse is 913; of the last 296; of the middle, the fourth word, 401; the numeric value of the first, middle and last words is thus 1610, or 230 sevens (Feature 7); the numeric value of the first, middle, and last letters of the 28 letters of this verse is 133, or 19 sevens (Feature 8). If now the first and last letters of each of the seven words in this verse have their numeric value placed against them, we have for their numeric value 1383, or 199 sevens.³⁰

Factoring number totals can prove almost anything. The practice also lends itself to omitting anything that does not fit a particular theory.³¹

After careful consideration of the *gematria* techniques employed by

²⁸Ibid., 205.

²⁹Ivan Panin, *Bible Numerics* (London: Covenant, 1934); idem, *The New Testament from the Greek Text as Established by Bible Numerics* (Toronto: Clark, Irvine, 1935).

³⁰Ivan Panin, "Bible Numerics," *Things to Come* 17 (December 1911):140.

³¹A more recent example of methodology the same as that of Bullinger and Panin is along popular lines: a prophetic book by Harold Camping (1994? [New York: Vantage, 1992]). In it the author, by using elaborate and detailed calculations, concluded that Jesus would return in September 1994. His hermeneutical methodology involved extensive use of *gematria*. For further treatment of this subject, see Robert Morey's series of articles on "Bible Numerics," in *The Truth Seeker* (Newport, Pa., November 1996–February 1997).

a number of writers, Davis provides the following excellent evaluation:

The thing that is of special interest, however, is the gross silence in works of the above men concerning the origin of their exegetical systems. No credit is ever given to Pythagoras the Talmudic or Cabalistic literature from which their methodology is derived. In fact, as one reads their works, he is constantly reminded of the fact that what they are proposing is new and unique. No man ever saw it until they brought it to light.³²

There is no objective basis for controlling this methodology. The interpreter selects his words, and the combinations of numbers that he wishes. In other words 7 might have several combinations ($6 + 1$, $5 + 2$, $4 + 3$). How do we know which of these combinations the author intended to bear symbolic implications? This whole system is based on a false premise. There is no proof that the Hebrews of the Old Testament used their alphabet in this manner (i.e., in Gematria). As was pointed out earlier, the Moabite Stone and the Siloam Inscription have their numbers written out. This is the case in all the Old Testament. If we should grant that the Hebrews did use their alphabet in this manner, it has yet to be proven that these two factors (i.e., Gematria and Number Symbolism) are combined in Scripture.³³

In addition to bequeathing to modern heirs the *gematria* technique, the Renaissance Cabalists also left the example of citing Cabalistic writings to illustrate the teaching of a plurality in the Godhead. The most recent work in this vein is one entitled *The Great Mystery, or, How Can Three Be One?* by Rabbi Tzvi Nassi (Hirsch Prinz). The title page describes him as Lecturer in Hebrew at Oxford University.³⁴

The volume's preface clearly delineates the volume's purpose:

The humble object of this little book is to prove that our sages of blessed memory, long before the Christian era, held that there was a plurality in the Godhead. Indeed, this teaching was held for yet 100 years after the destruction of the second temple, and, as it was contained and declared in the Holy Scriptures, it was also set forth in our most ancient books, as the reader will see from quotations given in these pages.³⁵

Nassi has written the book as a first-person description of the spiritual search of one "Nathanael" in the volumes of his father's library.

³²John Davis, *Biblical Numerology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968) 133.

³³*Ibid.*, 148-49.

³⁴Tzvi Nassi, *The Great Mystery* (Jerusalem: Yanetz Ltd., 1970). Nassi was actually a "Rev. C. W. H. Pauli." See David Cooper, *The God of Israel* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1945) 65.

³⁵*Ibid.*, ii.

Nathanael's method is to examine the passages in Scripture which seem to him to teach the plurality of persons in the Godhead. The author devotes much of the book, however, to supportive quotations from the *Zohar* and the *Sepher Yetsirah*. Nathanael (i.e., Nassi) apparently accepts without questioning the traditional authorship of the *Zohar* by Rabbi Simeon ben Yochai, a second-century Palestinian sage.³⁶ Modern Jewish scholars, however, are in full agreement that the *Zohar* was essentially the creation of Moses de Leon in the late thirteenth century.³⁷ Most Jewish scholars today would seriously challenge the author's evaluation of the *Zohar* as the highest authority for Jewish belief when he writes, "[The *Zohar*] is considered among my nation to be of the highest authority in things pertaining to the knowledge of the nature and essence of God."³⁸

Although Nassi does not accept the traditional Abrahamic authorship of *Sepher Yetsirah*, he does say,

The book has great authority in the synagogue. It is probable that it may have been written shortly before or soon after the Babylonian captivity. Though this hypothesis may be disputed, at any rate it existed before the Christian era.³⁹

No Jewish scholar would accept that dating today. The general opinion is that *Sepher Yetsirah* was composed no earlier than the 6th century C.E.⁴⁰

Nassi does cite some very interesting quotations from these Cabalistic works that appear to advocate a plurality in the Godhead. His discussion of the *Memra* ('**rmym**) or "Word of the Lord" and the divine attributes associated with it and his explanation of the *Metatron* (**,wrttm**), the exalted being often spoken of in divine terms, raise important subjects that need further exploration in the Jewish-Christian dialogue.⁴¹ His heavy dependence on works of Cabala in an uncritical fashion lessens the force of his arguments, however, even for the modern orthodox Jew to whom the works carry even less authority than other medieval Jewish writings. The force of the Christian argument rises and falls on the exegesis of Scripture, not on finding Jewish writings that appear to support the Christian posi-

³⁶Ibid., 5.

³⁷Scholem, *Major Trends* 156-204.

³⁸Nassi, *Great Mystery* 5.

³⁹Ibid., 6.

⁴⁰Scholem, *Major Trends* 75.

⁴¹Nassi, *Great Mystery* 30-44, 60-68. For a thorough discussion of the *Memra* and the *Metatron*, see George Foot Moore, "Intermediaries in Jewish Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 15 (January 1922):42-85.

tion.⁴²

CONCLUSION

The Jewish-Christian discussion will continue to be a lively debate in the future. It is the author's firm contention, however, that it should continue apart from any Cabalistic frame of relevance. The Christian should not consider the emanation doctrine of the Cabala in any form as a valid doctrinal view. Neither the OT nor the NT verifies its truthfulness. After all, Scripture is the only reliable means by which to authenticate such a concept. The Cabalistic theory of sefirot has far more similarity to the metaphysical world of Gnosticism than to the biblical worldview. Not only does the Bible never mention the sefirot, but it has passages that clearly contradict the idea that a series of emanations exist between God and man: "For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5, NASB).

Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God (Col 2:18-19, NASB).

Since the NT deals with some strongly metaphysical matters in its discussion of God, it would be strange indeed if the emanation doctrine were entirely absent if that were the worldview of its authors. The sefirot doctrine is unnecessary for the Christian. The incarnate Son responded to Philip's request to be shown the Father in this unequivocal way, leaving no room for competing mediatorial beings or spheres:

Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and *yet* you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how *can* you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves (John 14:9-11, NASB).

The attempts by some Renaissance scholars to give a Christian interpretation to the Cabala arose from different motives—some were seeking to establish a true understanding of reality (Pico), while others

⁴²Further critical evaluation of Cabalistic metaphysics is available in John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1973) 87-95.

were seeking to convert Jewish people to a Christianity that would have more affinity with their background (Ricci). Although their motives may have been sincere, their hermeneutical methodology was so defective that they did more harm than good in its implementation. Their writings serve to warn Christians today about how *not* to conduct the Jewish-Christian discussion. Furthermore, their questionable borrowing of such Cabalistic techniques as *gematria* should serve as a serious warning to modern evangelical teachers to beware of straying from a grammatical-historical hermeneutic.