

Is the God of the Rabbis Really the God of Abraham?  
Greek and Pagan Influences in Rabbinic Cosmology;  
A Preliminary Study of Jewish Rationalism and Mysticism

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## Introduction

New Covenant believers have often been put on the defensive by our opposition in the rabbinic community. We have been charged with believing in a non-Biblical view of God: the Trinity. The New Covenant has been charged with being a syncretistic combination of Jewish, Greek, and Pagan concepts. This paper is presented by way of defense and as an examination of the competing truth claims of the rabbis versus Messiah Jesus and the apostles he appointed. In this debate the New Covenant faith is often attacked as having been influenced by paganism and is charged with being less than consistent with the Hebrew Scriptures. I will not in this paper deal with that accusation, as it has been thoroughly dealt with by others.<sup>1</sup>

It has occurred to me, however, that, as has often been the case, what the rabbis accuse the Apostles of, not only cannot be substantiated, rather, they themselves have been guilty of doing precisely what they charge Jesus and Apostles with. For instance, they charge Jesus and the Apostles with not observing the Law, yet they kept the Law, and advocated keeping the Law when properly understood as to its true intent and its greater fulfillment in Messiah. As Jesus pointed out, the Pharisees were really the ones breaking the Law, especially as to its deeper realization.<sup>2</sup> As it is with the Law, so it is also with the rabbis' basic concept of God.

## A Few Words on My Purpose

Rabbinic thought is far from being the pristine biblical doctrine, and, in fact, the rabbinical view, or perhaps it is better to say *views*, are not only less than fully biblical, they are not even purely “Hebrew” —they have in fact been influenced by Greek and Pagan thinking. Yet some claim Rabbinic Judaism is not only the true and pure Biblical monotheism, *but the claim is also made that this system of thought was actually given by God to his specially appointed spiritual authorities, the rabbis*. Let me make it clear that this is not written as an attack on those who practice Judaism, as there are, humanly speaking, many fine people who follow this system. Beyond question those developing rabbinic thought were great and brilliant thinkers, as were many pagan philosophers. I in no way wish to imply anything less.

Beyond doubt there are many Greek and Pagan influences in post New Testament Christian tradition, indeed, many sources had influence on Christian thinkers. We see this clearly in the early church fathers, medieval theologians, and modern theology. However, this same charge can legitimately be leveled against the theology of the rabbis, which is claimed to be authoritative, unlike Christian theological tradition. The New Covenant faith never claims authority for its post-Biblical teachings and teachers —Judaism does. This is precisely why the Reformation called for continual reformation and an examination of all things to see if they are indeed Biblical.<sup>3</sup> Rabbinic Judaism, in all its varied forms, claims a certain divine authority to rabbinic tradition taken as a whole. It is with this claim in mind that we precede.

## Methodological Considerations

This short summary is a preliminary survey of what I have discovered to date. As this is being written at the relative outset of an investigation that I hope to continue for several years, this brief account claims to be neither comprehensive nor speaking as an authority. I'm sure this study is imperfect, though I have tried to be as accurate as I can. When one gets in to this topic, one's head begins to spin. It is a complex subject with streams flowing in and out to a plethora of related topics, such as, Greek and other pagan philosophies and religions, the origins and nature of Gnosticism and various forms of mysticism and gnosis, Islamic studies and the relationship between Islamic and rabbinic scholarship, the history of ideas, the varieties of Kabbalistic thought, philosophical issues such as the “one and the many” problem, the nature of syncretism, the doctrine of the Trinity, the issue of anthropomorphism, etc. I make no claim of being an authority of any of these matters. To narrow all of this down a bit I will primarily focus on older classic rabbinic rationalist theology as expressed by Maimonides the Aristotlean and, from the other side of the orthodox rabbinic spectrum, Kabbalistic

mysticism. Let me also say that when one deals with the history of ideas, it is not always possible to make a definite or direct literary connection. In other words, sometimes ideas just seem to be out there floating around. For instance, many people today are “Post-modern” in their outlook, but they have never read anything directly and explicitly advocating a Post-modern philosophy.<sup>4</sup> I will need to simply demonstrate the parallels at points without establishing a direct dependence or literary connection. Additionally, some issues relating to the relationship between, for example, Gnosticism and Kabbalah are currently being debated by scholars and opinions vary as to which came first and in which direction the influence flowed.

A further complicating factor is the great complexity and diversity of rabbinic thought. I will make little attempt to deal with modern rabbinic thinking and will need to concentrate on the classic Jewish theology of Maimonides. Arguably pagan influences are still being added to liberal Judaism. It seems to make sense to focus on the thinking of Maimonides and the speculations of Kabbalah, as these represent the two poles of Rationalism and Mysticism. Most classical Jewish thinking, I believe, falls somewhere in between these two polarities.

With these methodological considerations on the table, let us proceed. Again, this is a preliminary study and I always welcome comment or further instruction.

### **Rabbinic Cosmology**

Rabbinic cosmology, in its varied forms, is certainly largely Biblical, and the Torah has always put some controlling limitation on rabbinic speculation which has kept it from becoming totally pagan.

There are different strains of rabbinic thought, but generally, as I have just said, I believe it has tended to vacillate between the two poles of rationalism, which has emphasized God’s transcendence, and mysticism, which has emphasized God’s immanence. Actually, the situation is more complex than this, as rabbinic thought has often synthesized the two poles, but even in doing so the transcendence of God is not purely the Biblical teaching about transcendence and the immanence of God is not purely the Biblical teaching about immanence, as we’ll see below.

### **Transcendence and Immanence: Pagan vs. Biblical**

Before going any further it will be helpful to define terms and to consider briefly the differences between pagan and Biblical teaching regarding transcendence and imminence. Simply put, transcendence means God is above his creation. Immanence means God is also present and involved in what he has made. As Van Til has pointed out, both pagan and biblical thought speak of transcendence and immanence, but what they mean by the terms are very different indeed. Unless one makes a distinction between the biblical view and the pagan view of these ideas one can fall prey to serious error. John Frame writes:

Historically, terrible problems have developed with concepts of transcendence and immanence. The transcendence of God (His exaltation, His mysteriousness) has been understood as God\*s being infinitely removed from the creation, being so far from us, so different from us, so “wholly other” and “wholly hidden” that we can have no knowledge of Him and can make no true statements about Him. Such a god, therefore, has not revealed—and perhaps cannot reveal—himself to us. He is locked out of human life, so that for practical purposes we become our own gods. God says nothing to us, and we have no responsibilities to Him.

Similarly, the concept of immanence has been distorted in non-Christian thought, even in some would-be Christian theologies. Immanence has been understood to mean that God is virtually indistinguishable from the world, that when God enters the world He becomes so “worldly” that

He cannot be found. The “Christian atheists” used to say that God abandoned His divinity and no longer exists as God. Less "radical" thinkers, like Barth and Bultmann, argued that though God still exists, His activity cannot be identified in space and time, that it affects all times and places equally and none in particular. Thus, in effect, there is no revelation; we have no responsibility before God.<sup>5</sup>

The Biblical God is both transcendent and immanent. But combining the two pagan conceptions of transcendence and immanence does not result in a Biblical result. Van Til writes:

It is not a sufficient description of Christian theism when we say that as Christians we believe in both the transcendence and the immanence of God while pantheistic systems believe only in the immanence of God and deistic systems only in the transcendence of God. The transcendence we believe in is not transcendence of deism and the immanence we believe in is not the immanence of pantheism. In the case of deism transcendence virtually means separation while in the case of pantheism immanence virtually means identification. And if we add separation to identification we do not have theism as a result. As we mean a certain kind of God when as theists we speak of God, so also we mean a certain kind of transcendence and a certain kind of immanence when we use these terms. The Christian doctrine of God implies a definite conception of the relation of God to the created universe.<sup>6</sup>

John Frame has provided a simple but helpful illustration of this idea by means of a box. The top left corner represents the Biblical view of transcendence, while the top right the pagan. Likewise, the bottom left represents the pagan view of immanence and the bottom right the pagan view. Crossing lines from top corners to bottom corners on opposite sides represent opposing the biblical transcendence with the pagan immanence and the biblical immanence with the pagan immanence:

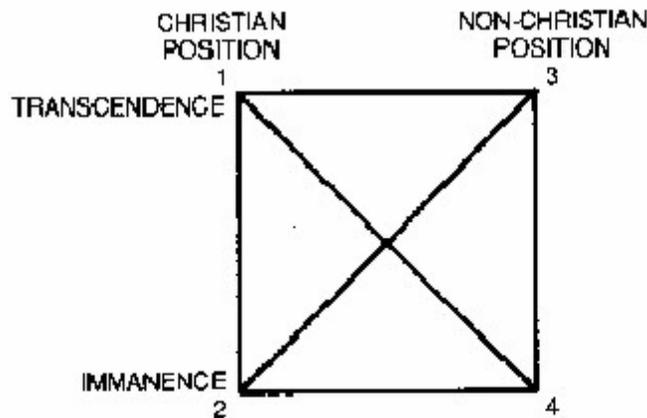


Fig. 1. The square of religious opposition.

Frame explains

The four corners represent four assertions:

1. God is head of the covenant.
2. God is involved as Lord with His creatures.
3. God is infinitely far removed from the creation.
4. God is identical to the creation.

Assertions 1 and 2 are biblical assertions, 3 and 4 are unbiblical. The first assertion represents a biblical view of divine transcendence, the second a biblical view of divine immanence. The third

assertion represents a nonbiblical view of transcendence, the fourth a nonbiblical view of immanence....

1 asserts that God is distinct from creation as Lord, 4 denies any distinction at all; 2 asserts a meaningful involvement, 3 denies it. The horizontal lines indicate linguistic similarity: both 1 and 3 can be expressed as views of "transcendence," "exaltation," "mystery," and so forth; both 2 and 4 can be described as forms of "involvement," "immanence," and so forth. Thus there is plenty of room for misunderstanding. Although the two views are diametrically opposed, they can be confused with one another. Even biblical passages can be used in confusing ways.<sup>7</sup>

## Plato and Aristotle

To understand the post-exilic world and pagan influences on Jewish thought, something needs to be said about Plato and Aristotle, two seminal thinker's whose views heavily influenced more than a millennium of thinking afterward. These men have left an indelible mark on the development of philosophical thought and still influence it today. Again, I certainly make no claim of expertise as a philosopher, but I have come to understand a little of their thinking. Hodge says:

Plato was not a Theist, in the ordinary and Christian sense of that word. He did not recognize the existence of an extramundane God, the creator, preserver, and governor of the world, on whom we are dependent and to whom we are responsible. With him God is not a person. As Anselm and the Realists generally admitted the existence of "rationality" as distinct from rational beings; a general principle which became individual and personal in angels and men; so Plato admitted the existence of an universal intelligence, or nous, which becomes individualized in the different orders of intelligent beings, gods, demons; and men. God with him was an Idea; the Idea of the Good; which comprehended and gave unity to all other ideas

When it comes to Aristotle's concept of the divine:

...this infinite intelligence, which he called God, was pure intelligence, destitute of power and of will; neither the creator nor the framer of the world; unconscious, indeed, that the world exists; as it is occupied exclusively in thought of which it is itself the object..<sup>8</sup>

According to Ronald H. Nash:

Aristotle did not worship or pray to his God... His God was a metaphysical necessity, a concept required lest the rest of his system contain some huge holes. His system forced him to questions that he could not answer without postulating the existence of a perfect being who is the Unmoved Mover of the universe... Aristotle's God would have to be Pure Actuality, in other words, Form without Matter.

Now this doctrine of God as Pure Form has raised all kinds of problems in the histories of philosophy and theology. For one thing, what can a god who is Pure Form –the Unmoved Mover of the universe --do?... It turns out that the only thing Aristotle's perfect and changing God can do is think... He can only think about Himself.<sup>9</sup>

Pagan rationalists Plato and Aristotle had views of divine transcendence that put God so far above his creation that he had little direct involvement with it, and essentially nothing can be said about the divine itself. It is not possible for a god who is an absolute transcendent unity to be involved with mere matter. Plato saw the world as the product of the *Demiurge*, a sort of lesser deity. Aristotle saw God as the unmoved prime mover, who was so

far above his creation that he had no direct contact with it. In fact, his god's thought consisted entirely of self contemplation. God's essence was so wholly other that nothing positive could actually be said about it. One can only speak of God *via negativa*, that is, by means of the negative. In other words, one cannot say what God really is, one can only say what God isn't. We can only speak of God in double negatives.

On the other hand, pagan religious and philosophical immanence identifies the divine so closely with the creation that it either becomes the creation itself or part of it. This was certainly true of Stoic pantheistic philosophy. And pagan deities are either fallible created beings or the universe itself as a whole is god. Aristotle sees the creation as existing eternally along with God.

As Plato made ideas eternal and immutable; as they were all included in the idea of God, i. e., in God; and as they constitute the only really existing beings, all that is phenomenal or that affects the senses being mere shadows of the real, it can hardly be denied that his system in its essential character is really pantheistic. It is, however, an ideal Pantheism. It does not admit that matter or evil is a manifestation of God, or mode of his existence. Only what is good, is God; but all that really is, is good.<sup>10</sup>

Even Aristotle's views also ultimately have a pantheistic side to them:

The world and God are coeternal; and yet, in a certain sense, God is the cause of the world. As a magnet acts on matter, or as the mere presence of a friend stirs the mind, so God unconsciously operates on matter, and awakens its dormant powers<sup>11</sup>

There is always a paradox in operation in pagan thought. Plato's god, understood as the ultimate transcendent rational principle, and Aristotle's god, the unmoved prime mover, are essentially unknown and unknowable. Such a god has little to do with the world directly. Yet, we cannot really say anything at all about him rationally. Plato ultimately resorted to mystical experience as the way to perceive God. The rationalist ultimately becomes an irrationalist when operating autonomously from his Creator.

Jewish theologians, enamored with rationalistic philosophy have often combined biblical elements with pagan elements. This also certainly been the case with Muslim and Christian thinkers. We will discuss this further shortly, but for a moment put this on the back burner.

## **Gnosticism**

There is another philosophy we must consider for our inquiry here, Gnosticism. There is much debate as to when Gnosticism actually arose. Some scholars argue for a pre-Christian Gnosticism. Others contend that Gnosticism arose after the advent of Christianity. Some define Gnosticism broadly, as "a religious movement in which salvation depends on knowledge." Others define Gnosticism more narrowly "pointing out that the system is basically dualistic, that it contains a myth of a descending and ascending Redeemer, and so on."<sup>12</sup> Some use the term Gnosis to denote the broader concept. Nash points out that scholars are in disagreement as to terminology. He uses the definition of Wilson:

By Gnosticism we mean the specifically Christian heresy of the second century A.D., by Gnosis, in a broader sense, the whole complex of ideas belonging to the Gnostic movement and related trends of thought.<sup>13</sup>

A concern here is with the metaphysics of Gnosticism. Influenced by Greek rationalism, Gnosis saw the ultimate god as essentially unknowable, similar to Plato and Aristotle. Says Armstrong:

The Gnostics all began with an utterly incomprehensible reality which they called the Godhead, since it was the source of the lesser being that we call "God." There was nothing at all that we could say about it, since it entirely eludes the grasp of our limited minds. As Valentinus explained, the Godhead was

perfect and pre-existent . . . dwelling in invisible and unnameable heights: this is the prebeginning and forefather and depth. It is uncontainable and invisible, eternal and ungenerated, is Quiet and deep Solitude for infinite aeons. With It was thought, which is also called Grace and Silence.

Men have always speculated about this Absolute, but none of their explanations have been adequate. It is impossible to describe the Godhead, which is neither "good" nor "evil" and cannot even be said to "exist." Basilides taught that in the beginning, there had been not God but only the Godhead, which, strictly speaking, was Nothing because it did not exist in any sense that we can understand.

But this Nothingness had wished to make itself known and was not content to remain alone in Depth and Silence. There was an inner revolution in the depths of its unfathomable being which resulted in a series of emanations similar to those described in the ancient pagan mythologies. The first of these emanations was the "God," which we know and pray to. Yet even "God" was inaccessible to us and needed further elucidation. Consequently new emanations proceeded from God in pairs, each of which expressed one of his divine attributes. "God" lay beyond gender but, as in the Enuma Elish, each pair of emanations consisted of a male and female—a scheme which attempted to neutralize the masculine tenor of more conventional monotheism. Each pair of emanations grew weaker and more attenuated, since they were getting ever further from their divine Source. Finally, when thirty such emanations (or aeons) had emerged, the process stopped and the divine world, the Pleroma, was complete....

There had been a catastrophe, a primal fall, which the Gnostics described in various ways. Some said that Sophia (Wisdom), the last of the emanations, fell from grace because she aspired to a forbidden knowledge of the inaccessible Godhead. Because of her overweening presumption, she had fallen from the Pleroma and her grief and distress had formed the world of matter. Exiled and lost, Sophia had wandered through the cosmos, yearning to return to her divine Source. This amalgam of oriental and pagan ideas expressed the Gnostics' profound sense that our world was in some sense a perversion of the celestial, born of ignorance and dislocation. Other Gnostics taught that "God" had not created the material world, since he could have had nothing to do with base matter. This had been the work of one of the aeons, which they called the demiourgos or Creator. He had become envious of "God" and aspired to be the center of the Pleroma. Consequently he fell and had created the world in a fit of defiance.<sup>14</sup>

Matter was seen as inherently evil, and so the universe was created by an emanation or emanations from the unknown deity. Says Nash:

Human souls are sparks of the divine light which have become trapped in matter.

The Gnostic's also believed in a huge host of intermediary beings who inhabit the regions between God and men...the postulation of intermediary beings between God and the world was prominent in the thought of Philo and the middle Platonists. The Gnostic's usually explained these intermediary beings (often called aeons) and emanations of the good god. The Gnostic picture of the various spheres or layers between this god and the material world often got quite

complicated...<sup>15</sup>

We will see many of these ideas arising later when we look at Kabbalah, but, once again, let us put this on the back burner and proceed.

## **Judaism After Babylon**

It is certainly beyond of a scope of this little paper to provide even a cursory history of Jewish thought. But let us briefly consider a couple of strains of Jewish thought coming out of the Babylonian captivity.

Goldberg has pointed out Judaism's deanthropomorphizing of God in the wake of the idolatry that led to the judgment of the captivity. When considering the writings of this period he says:

One aspect of interpreting the texts has been the issue of deanthropomorphizing God, that is, how can we speak of God, His hands, eyes, ears, mouth, face, and so on. Already, by the 400s B.C.E., the religious leaders wanted to protect the high and lofty character of Israel's calling by their God. Specifically, the people of Judea must never confuse their God with the pagan deities of the nations in the Middle East. The Babylonian exile was a national trauma affecting the people of Judea and one of the main designs of God's providence was to purify a remnant among Israel who would never place their God on the same level as other pagan deities (Micah 4: 9, 10). Therefore, the postexilic leaders and writers began and continued a process that emphasized God's transcendence.<sup>16</sup>

One can see how, in this context Greek rationalistic conceptions of the deity, especially those of Plato and Aristotle which emphasized a radical view of transcendence, would become attractive to Jewish thinkers. But the God of the Bible is not only transcendent, he is also immanent. The first major attempt to bring together Greek philosophy and biblical teaching came through the Jewish philosopher Philo. Edersheim sees Philo as combining both pagan notions of transcendence and immanence with the biblical concepts:

...In reference to God, we find, side by side, the apparently contradictory views of the Platonic and the Stoic schools. Following the former, the sharpest distinction was drawn between God and the world. God existed neither in space, nor in time; He had neither human qualities nor affections; in fact, He was without any qualities (*apoj*), even without any name (*apphtoj*), hence wholly unrecognizable by man (*akatal hptoj*)...

But side by side with this we have, to save the Jewish, or rather Old Testament, idea of creation and providence, the Stoic notion of God as immanent in the world --in fact, that alone which is real in it, as always working: in short, to use his own Pantheistic expression, as 'Himself one and the all' (*eij kai to pan*). Chief in His Being is His goodness, the forthcoming of which was the ground of creation. Only the good comes from Him. With matter He can have nothing to do--hence the plural number in the account creation. God only created the soul, and that only of the good. In the sense of being immanence God is everywhere --nay, all things are really only in Him, or rather He is real in all...<sup>17</sup>

To what extent did Philo influence Judaism? It is difficult to say, and surely he is on one extreme, but he serves as an example of the syncretistic tendencies of the intertestamental period. Rabbinic thought was not as radical as Philo, yet it was also Hellenized. Robert M. Setzer, in his book *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, says of Philo:

Exploring potentialities of Jewish monotheism through the medium of Greek thought, Philo introduced into Jewish theology several striking departures from biblical thinking, especially of dualism of body and soul in ascetic depreciation of the physical world... Philo also represents an important stage in the emergence of the Neo-Platonic school of philosophy in late antiquity, which held that the cosmos was a hierarchical continuum of grades of being, emanating of the One into the lower levels of reality; this Neo-Platonism was later to have considerable impact on Christian and Jewish thought.

Even though Philo had little direct impact on Judaism, the problem he faced –how to integrate Greek philosophy in Jewish teaching in a single conception of ultimate truth– returned in full force to confront Jewish thinkers of the Middle Ages. Like Philo, they used allegory (though of a different sort); like Philo they interpret the God of Judaism in Greek philosophical categories and remolded Greek assumptions about God, man, and the world to the perspective of scriptural faith. Philo was also a precursor of the monotheistic mysticism that reached its fruition in the Kabbalah during the medieval and early modern periods. However, medieval Jewish philosophy and mysticism would arise only after Judaism had been substantially transformed as a result of movements already active in Judea before Philo’s lifetime.<sup>18</sup>

The Judaism of the first century had already begun to drift from the biblical revelation toward a more Hellenized approach. Setzer also says:

“...all branches and forms of Judaism were affected in some degree by the spiritual concerns and social pressures of the Hellenistic environment (the Greek language and Culture penetrated Judea as it did the other lands of the Near East)...<sup>19</sup>

How did Hellenistic–Jewish writers appropriate Greek philosophical themes for the defense of the religion? Belief in one God was a connecting link... It was a widespread assumption among Hellenistic – Jewish intellectuals that the Greek philosophers had acquired their ideas, especially the one God, from Moses.<sup>20</sup>

### **Merkava Mysticism: Ascent to the Heavenly Halls (Hekhalot)**

Another strain of Jewish thought, the opposite pole, conceived of God in mystical rather than philosophical terms. Though I certainly do not recommend everything she writes, which is from an extremely liberal and unbelieving theological position, Karen Armstrong, in her book *A History of God*, does make some interesting connections. She has done an impressive job in pulling together a wide variety of sources and ideas. She describes Jewish mysticism during the second third centuries:

... The early Jewish mysticism that developed during the second third centuries, which was very difficult for Jews, seems to emphasize the gulf between God and man. Jews wanted to turn away from a world in which they were persecuted and marginalized to a more powerful divine realm. They imagined God as a mighty king who could only be approached in a perilous journey through the seven heavens. Instead of expressing themselves in the simple direct style of the Rabbis, the mystics used sonorous, grandiloquent language. The Rabbis needed this spirituality, and the mystics were anxious not to antagonize them. Yet this “Throne Mysticism,” as it was called, must have filled an important need since it continued to flourish alongside the great rabbinic academies until was finally incorporated into Kabbalah, the new Jewish mysticism, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries....

The Rabbis had had some remarkable religious experiences, as we have seen. On the occasion

when the Holy Spirit descended upon Rabbi Yohannon and his disciples in the form of fire from heaven, they had apparently been discussing the meaning of Ezekiel's strange vision of God's chariot. The chariot and the mysterious figure that Ezekiel had glimpsed sitting upon its throne seem to have been the subject of early esoteric speculation. The Study of the Chariot (*Ma'aseh Merkavah*) was often linked to speculation about the meaning of the creation story (*Ma'aseh Bereshit*). The earliest account we have of the mystical ascent to God's throne in the highest heavens emphasized the immense perils of the spiritual journey...

... Rabbi Akiva was mature enough to survive the mystical way unscathed.<sup>21</sup>

This Merkabah mysticism was a form of Jewish mysticism which included fanciful speculations surrounding the divine chariot or divine throne in the figure seated thereupon. Jewish mystics, in anthropomorphic terms, reflected on the measurements and shape of God and sought to mystically ascend to the Heavenly Halls (hekhlot). As Gershom Scholem, one of the foremost experts on Kabbalah, as written:

These texts exude a sense of the world beyond; and a numinous feeling emanates even from these enormous, seemingly blasphemous numbers and from the monstrous seriousness of names. God's majesty and holiness, the form of the celestial king and Creator, assume physical shape in these numerical proportions. What moved these mystics was not the spirituality of His being, but the majesty of his theophany... In reality, though, all measurements fail, and the strident anthropomorphism is suddenly and paradoxically transformed into its opposite: the spiritual.<sup>22</sup>

We should not take these anthropomorphic terms too literally, as their purpose is to evoke a mystical experience of God. According to Scholem, though some see it otherwise, the gnosis of Merkabah mysticism was influential in the later formulation of Gnosticism proper:

... I have assumed Doctrine of God's form to be extremely ancient, hence one that could have been adopted in gnostic circles that were joined by early Jewish converts to Christianity.

Scholem points out that ideas similar to those of Merkabah mysticism are in evidence in early rabbinic writings:

An important inclusion of our discussion is not nearly the fact of the existence of such images as that of a shape of God in ancient Jewish esoterism, but also the fact that we are not dealing here with the ideas of "heretical" groups on the periphery of rabbinic Judaism. On the contrary: the close link between these ideas and *Merkavah* mysticism can leave no doubt that the bearers of these speculations were at the very center of rabbinic Judaism in tannaitic and talmudic times.<sup>23</sup>

So we see in the early Judaism during the beginnings of the Christian era, several strains of thought. We have all been familiar with the emphasis on legal speculation in the reading of fences around the law characteristic of the Pharisees. However, we also see the beginnings of the mixture of Greek rational thought, emphasizing a transcendent and deanthropomorphized God, and a seemingly opposite strain of thought, centered in mystical experience, which uses anthropomorphic language.

Once again, put this on the back burner for a moment.

### **Mediaeval Developments: Rediscovery of both Aristotle and Mysticism**

Let us go forward 900 years. We see Greek philosophical rationalism and mystical gnosis returning with great force of influence in Maimonides' appropriation of Aristotelian thought and through the Kabbalistic use of pagan cosmology. These two extremes of Jewish thought might in some ways seem to be opposed to each

other, but in reality both flow from the same pagan mind. In rabbinism a synthesis was achieved not only between Greek thought and Biblical revelation, but also between different streams Greek thought. Quoting Sholem:

Medieval theology...was hard set on abolishing any view that attributed to God any human attributes whatever. These philosophers sought to push the Biblical concept of monotheism to it's utmost extreme, and even outdid the Bible itself in removing any vestiges therein of mystical or anthropomorphic parlance. It is no coincidence that Maimonides began his philosophical magnum opus, *Guide for the Perplexed*, by turning the key word tselem [image or form] on its head --Although, in his opinion, of course, right side up.

In the newly evolving Kabbalah, by contrast, we find the opposite tendency. Here, too, the spiritualization of the idea of God is an accepted fact, but in the reflections that took the place of the Merkavah visions, the ancient images reemerged, albeit now with a symbolic character. Unlike the philosophers, the Kabbalists were not ashamed of these images; on the contrary, they saw in them the repositories of divine mysteries.<sup>24</sup>

So in the medieval Jewish world, there is a rediscovery of both Aristotle and ancient mysticism in response to Aristotelean rational theology.

## **Maimonides**

Maimonides, a.k.a. Rambam (1135 –1204) is revered as one of the greatest Jewish theologians of all time, though admittedly some of his views are seen as somewhat dangerous. It has been said of Rambam “From Moses to Moses there is no other Moses.” Maimonides served as court physician to the Muslim Caliph in Cairo Egypt. The Muslims fore several centuries prior to Rambam had undergone a rediscovery of Aristotle. The Muslim Faylasufs (philosophers) had been combining Aristotle’s views with the Koran. Maimonides came under the influence of these Faylasufs and began to develop a Jewish version of their system. Maimonides wrote in Arabic.

In Aristotelean philosophy God is pure though and the “unmoved prime mover.” God is an absolute transcendent unity. The ultimate essence of God cannot be described by any positive terms, according to this theory, because any sort of differentiation in describing God would be inconsistent with his absolute unity and the possibility of having some sort of understanding of God in his essence would be inconsistent with his absolute transcendence. This gives rise to the concept of a “Negative Theology” which claims that we cannot make positive statements about who God is. We can only says God is not non-loving, for example. Rambam (Maimonides) embraced this approach, as did Muslim and Christian philosophers who also embraced Aristotle. Maimonides did not accept Aristotelianism completely, however, and he broke with Aristotle in understanding God as the direct creator of the world. But when the Bible seems to be in contradiction with the rationality of the Aristotelean system it must be reinterpreted, even allegorized, to bring about harmony between the two systems. Maimonides sought to recycle Aristotelean philosophy within a Jewish framework. However, in doing so there was a syncretism that resulted in a concept of God that was not purely Biblical —it was in part Aristotelean. There is a great deal of influence in Judaism’s concept of God that comes from this Greek notion of God’s transcendence and absolute unity. It is, at least in part, due to this imbalanced view of God that the Biblical truths of the Triune nature of God and the incarnation are rejected. The Biblical God, as seen in the first chapter of Genesis, creates by his personal powerful word and is present with his creation through his Holy Spirit. The Biblical God is, from the very beginning, both transcendent and immanent. He is a complex unity. He speaks to his creation and can be known because he has revealed himself to us.

## Kabbalah

Kabbalism, while rejecting this coldly rationalistic and overly philosophical concept of God, retained in part the idea of the transcendent God of whom nothing positive can be said. This is what they refer to as the *Ayn Sof*, the ultimate essence of God beyond which there is nothing. But Kabbalism also emphasized the immanence of God and wasn't adverse to the use of anthropomorphism in a way that the Aristoteleans were. Kabbalism brings together Jewish and gnostic elements and is a further development of Merkavah mysticism. Pagan ideas of gnosis are brought in line with a more Biblical view of God. As I mentioned earlier, which came first is debated among scholars. Gershom Scholem claims that Gnosticism comes from Jewish mysticism, while others claim that things happened the other way around. We won't solve this issue, but it may be helpful to consider ideas do not develop in quite so linear a format and no doubt there were cross-fertilizations going in both directions. The important point is the similarity between the system of thought and their distance from the Scriptural view of God.

I might also mention, at this point, that there are somewhat differing schools of thinking among the Kabbalists. What comes from the Chabad-Lubavitch movement is that of Isaac Luria as understood through Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Lylady. Most obvious in the different schools are differences in the arrangement of the *sephirot*, the emanations from God.

Kabbalistic mysticism largely comes from an attempt to explain creation. It is because of the act of creation that the divine emanations come about. It goes something like this: God, the absolute transcendent unity, the "*Ayn Sof*," ultimate being, was originally all that existed. *Ayn Sof* means "nothing beyond," as there is nothing beyond him. Though the ultimate reality, the *Ayn Sof* can also be called "nothingness," as from our finite perspective we can really know nothing of him. In order to make "space" for creation, he had to withdraw a bit of his divine presence. This is known as the act of *tzimzum*, withdrawing. As God withdrew some of his presence, there were some radiations of his glory remaining. The *Or Ayn Sof*, light of the *Ayn Sof*, is the primary radiation. The original arrangement of this divine light was Adam Kadmon, the "primordial man" or "Tree of Life" from whom the ten light radiations, called the "*Sefirot*," developed.

Somehow these personalized emanations of God are all one. Amazingly similar to the Gnostic aeons, they are paired, and the *sephira* of Shekinah, closest to Creation and personified as female, becomes estranged and wanders from the unity of the *sephirot* and goes into exile. Catastrophe results. The *sephirot* are his personalized attributes. I say personalized because they seem to take on a life of their own, even marital relations, though we must remember not to take this literally. It is the *sephirot* through whom creation comes. Though similar to the Gnostic aeons, the *sephirot* should not exactly be seen as a chain of being leading from God to the creation. They have a certain fraternity and a sharing in each other's essence. Still, there seems to be a movement, a development within the Godhead. God changes. To use terms we are used to God is ontologically one, but economically made up of the *Ayn Sof*, *Or Ayn Sof*, and the *Sefirot*. Thus, in his unknown essence, the *Ayn Sof*, God never changes and nothing can be said or known about him, but through the development of the *sephirot* God himself unfolds. An analogy is used that the soul is one but it is manifested through the various organs of the body. According to Scholem:

The essence of the Kabbalistic idea of God, as we have already stated, lies in its resolutely dynamic conception of the Godhead: God's creative power and vitality develop in an attending movement of his nature, which flows not only outward into Creation but also back into itself. Obviously, a fundamental contradiction was bound to arise between, on the one hand, this dynamic conception, which sought and found God's unity precisely in the secret life of his nature and, on the other hand, the Jewish tradition. After all, God's immutability and "unmovedness" was one of the bases upon which the prophetic perception of God seemed to coincide with the Aristotelian doctrine of the "unmoved Mover." In any event, the concept of an unchanging God

had long since enjoyed a position in the foreground of Jewish monotheistic belief, and was particularly accentuated in the rationalistic formulations of Jewish theology by the Jewish – Arabic philosophers...

Hence, the Kabbalists resorted to the expedient of differentiating between two strata of the Godhead: one, it's hidden being-in-itself, its immanence in the depths of its own being; and another, that of the creative and active nature, pressing outward toward expression. The former is indeed lacking in all motion or change and may be described or, better, circumscribed in negative terms, following the concepts of traditional philosophical theologians. The other strata is the dynamic aspect of infinite life, of potencies in which the process of God's creative and world-maintaining activities are realized. The former strata is designated in the language of the Kabbalists as *'Ein-Sof*, the undifferentiated unity, the self contained Root of Roots in which all contradictions merge and dissolve. The latter stratum is the structure of the ten *Sefiroth*, which are the sacred names –i.e., the various aspects of God-- or the ten words of Creation (logoi) by which everything was created.<sup>25</sup>

According to Kabbalah, the light of God's glory poured down the Sefirot as water into "vessels" (kelim), but after the first three (wisdom, knowledge and crown) the light could not be contained and it shattered the vessels. This was because of the individuality in the original arrangement of the Sefirot. The vessels tumbled down, retaining some of the fragmented light of God. As they tumbled further and further down they become more fragmented and differentiated, and in a way "Solid." Thus matter comes about, and in the chain of being towards non-being, below matter is evil. This explains how the world with all its divisions and differentiation could come from one who is absolute unity and how evil could come about. All this was God's plan. Evil gives man a choice and it ultimately serves God's good end. All this sounds a lot like Gnosticism, doesn't it. It is Gnosticism —just in a Jewish form.

So everything in creation still contains a divine spark, thus there is immanence as well as transcendence, the immanence being the divine light contained in the lower levels and the transcendence being the totality of the divine light which cannot be contained but is above and beyond all. In this non-biblical immanence we see a definite pantheistic tendency.

The prophets had stressed God holiness and separation from the world, but *The Zohar* [a primary Kabbalistic text] has suggested that the world of God's Sefirot comprised the whole reality. How could he be separate from the world if he was all in all?<sup>26</sup>

Now it is the duty of man, and especially Jews, (as Gentile souls are inferior) to be part of the divine rebuilding (tikkun) of the universe, which releases the divine sparks and actually helps reestablish an order within God himself as the Sefirot come into an interrelatedness and greater unity than their original configuration. God needs us, it seems, according to this cosmological schema, and God himself is affected by this whole process. We are in partnership with him in Tikkum Olam, the rebuilding of the universe. We even help save God himself by freeing divine sparks! This is why we were created, but Adam in sinning just made things worse. So we need to do acts of righteousness, the commandments of God, the 613 mitzvot, in order to achieve Tikkun Olam. When we uncover and release all the divine sparks<sup>27</sup> and even man's evil inclination itself is made to serve God, the Messianic redemption comes, evil is eliminated, and the created universe becomes a fit dwelling for God.

It is obvious if one does even a cursory study of Gnostic cosmology<sup>28</sup> that Kabbalistic mysticism is Gnosticism, or some would prefer to say, Gnosis, albeit Gnosticism stripped of its duality, antinomianism and its bias against the God of the Torah. It is pagan mysticism recycled into attempted conformity to Jewish tradition and the Biblical concept of God. Torah study as the highest mitzvah can be seen as redemption through knowledge,

though there is the retention of the Hebrew concept of knowledge being practical, not just intellectual. Syncretism has not been successfully avoided, however, as there are non-Biblical pagan elements present, such as pantheism, or at least panentheism, a deity who changes and has need of man,<sup>29</sup> reincarnation, occult practices (such as numerology), uncontrolled allegory supposedly bringing out “hidden” meanings, and an extra-Biblical pagan speculative cosmology.

### **The Trinity is Biblical and Jewish**

We’ve been considering the Jewish in Greek theologies and philosophies and how they have wrestled with the idea of God’s absolute unity and the diversity of his attributes. Both Jewish and Greek philosophers also had great difficulty in deriving the particularity and diversity of creation from a God of such absolute unity. The god of Maimonides is a god of absolute transcendent unity, he is an unknowable god, or least a god of which nothing positive can be said in terms of his attributes. The god of Kabbalah, is a god who himself, while absolute and unknowable in essence, goes through changes in his being, and even becomes trapped within creation. He is a god ultimately dependent upon man to free his divine sparks trapped in the created order. For Maimonides God’s diversity gets swallowed up and God’s unity. For the Kabbalists, God’s unity and transcendence are swallowed up in God’s unfolding diversity. The Biblical answer is the doctrine of the Trinity.

I do not need to convince those present that the Trinity is the doctrine of the Hebrew Bible. I will not take the time here to provide Biblical proof texts to establish the truth of Trinitarian Theology. Consider however one or two points. The doctrine of the Trinity maintains that within the eternal Godhead both unity and diversity are equally ultimate. The three persons of the Trinity equally process the essence of deity and the divine attributes. The unity of God is not swallowed up by the diversity within himself, neither is the diversity within God swallowed up by his unity. Eternally within the Godhead there exists personality, communication, creativity, love, justice, righteousness, and community. The Son is eternally the Son of the Father. The Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son. Yet God is perfectly one. God does not undergo change, and, for us, the ontological Trinity is one and the same as the economic Trinity, that is, the eternal Triune God has revealed himself as the Triune God of Creation and Redemption. He has acted without himself changing. God is Covenant Lord over his creation, transcendent and not part of what he is made, yet imminent and intimately involved with his creation and his redeemed people. The God of Creation, the God of Israel, is not in impersonal transcendent principle, neither is he some unknown and unknowable prime mover, neither is he the Ayn Sof. The Biblical Creator, the God of Abraham, himself a complex unity, needs no emanation to unfold himself and create the universe. The Biblical Triune God is not only the true God of Israel, but the genius of his revealed nature provides the solution to the philosophical and theological issues that have been wrestled with for generations.

It is this God who created the universe, wrestled with Jacob, who lead Israel out of Egypt, and who was intimately involved with his redeemed people. In this transcendent Trinity who, in the person of his Son, revealed himself to Israel in the most ultimate and anthropomorphic manner in order to achieve our salvation and establish the eternal Covenant.

### **Conclusion**

Rabbinic cosmology is simply not Biblical —it is, at least in part Greek and pagan. One can argue, if one is prone to take things out to their ultimate conclusion, that the God of the rabbis is not the God of the Bible at all. We can confidently say, at the very least, that the God of Judaism is a syncretistic admixture of Biblical teaching, pagan philosophy and pagan mysticism. These extra-Biblical influences first came in through the exile of the Jewish people to Babylon, then through the invasion of pagan culture into Israel during the Hellenistic period, then through the Diaspora of the Jewish people in the pagan world, particularly among the Muslims

where the influences of Greek philosophy went through a renaissance.

Rabbinic Scholasticism and Kabbalistic Mysticism are by no means pure and pristine theologies. Both have been corrupted by pagan thought. Ultimately, the God of the Bible is neither the God of Maimonides nor the God of the Kabbalah. He is the Holy Trinity. The rabbis have mixed the Biblical self-revelation of God with pagan ideas. Is this partly why Kabbalah is becoming so popular with New Agers? Judaism is syncretistic at the most basic level, in its concept of God. The God of Judaism is not the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Do Orthodox Jews believe in the same God as do Christians? I will answer this in a typically rabbinic way -- yes and no! To the extent that they follow the Biblical revelation they believe in the same God as we do, but to the extent that they follow paganism they worship an idol. The god of Aristotle is not the God of the Bible. The god of Gnostic mysticism is not the God of the Bible. A god who is unknown and ultimately unknowable, a god who is not directly in touch with his creatures and with his covenant people, is not the God who in the person of the son, made himself known to his disciples and to us in an intimate way. Immanuel has made the Father known and His Holy Spirit strives with us. This is the God of Abraham.

Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture!" says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, concerning the shepherds who care for my people: "You have scattered my flock, and have driven them away, and you have not attended to them.... Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes; they speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. For who among them has stood in the council of the LORD to perceive and to hear his word, or who has given heed to his word and listened?...In the latter days you will understand it clearly. "I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, then they would have proclaimed my words to my people, and they would have turned them from their evil way, and from the evil of their doings. "Am I a God at hand, says the LORD, and not a God afar off? Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I cannot see him? says the LORD. Do I not fill heaven and earth? says the LORD. I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name, saying, —I have dreamed, I have dreamed!' How long shall there be lies in the heart of the prophets who prophesy lies, and who prophesy the deceit of their own heart, who think to make my people forget my name by their dreams which they tell one another, even as their fathers forgot my name for Ba'al? Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, but let him who has my word speak my word faithfully. What has straw in common with wheat? says the LORD. Is not my word like fire, says the LORD, and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces? Therefore, behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who steal my words from one another. Behold, I am against the prophets, says the LORD, who use their tongues and say, —Says the LORD.' Behold, I am against those who prophesy lying dreams, says the LORD, and who tell them and lead my people astray by their lies and their recklessness, when I did not send them or charge them; so they do not profit this people at all, says the LORD....you pervert the words of the living God, the LORD of hosts, our God. (From Isaiah 32, *passim*)

**Other Helpful Resources:**

Bahnsen, Dr. Greg L., *History of Western Philosophy*, tape series, Covenant Tape Ministry, Auburn, CA

Clark, Gordon H., *Thales to Dewey, A History of Philosophy*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI

Schochet, Jacob Immanuel, *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, Kehot Publication Society, Brooklyn, NY

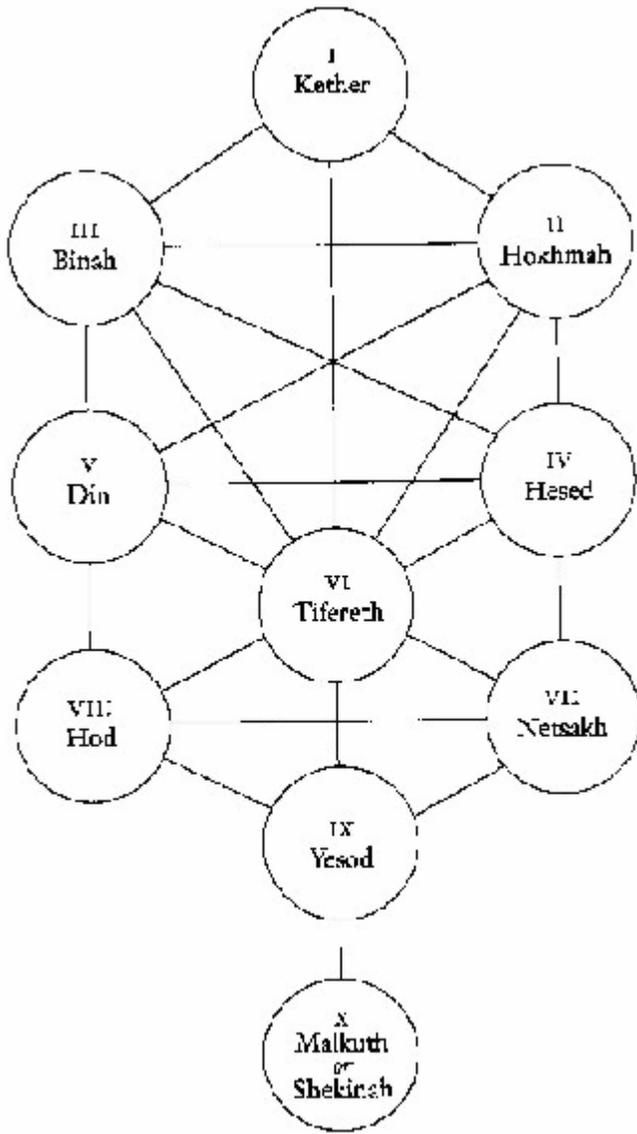
Scholem, Gershom, *Origins of Kabbalah*, Jewish Publication Society - Princeton University Press

Foxbrunner, Roman a., HABAD, *The Hasidism of Rabbu Shneur Zalman of Lylady*, Jason Aronson, Inc., Northvale, NJ

**Charts and Illustrations:**

Scripture	Aristotle	Maimonides	Gnosis	Kabbalah
The Triune God is eternal and transcendent, yet is also imminent.	The Unmoved Prime-Mover is incomprehensible and removed from creation.	God is ultimately transcendent and unknowable.	The Bouthos is the unknowable divine essence.	The Ayn Sof is the unknowable divine essence.
We can truly know God as he reveals himself to us.	We can only speak of him <i>via negativa</i>	We can only speak of him <i>via negativa</i>	We can only speak of him <i>via negativa</i>	We can only speak of him <i>via negativa</i>
The Creator is the Covenant Lord who is very involved in his creation	Creation is eternal (Emanated?)	God created the world.	Emanations, often in pairs result in the created order	10 emanations in pairs result in the created order
Unity and diversity are equally ultimate	Absolute Unity is Stressed	Absolute Unity is Stressed	Emanations blur Creator/Creature distinctions. Divine spark is trapped in matter.	Emanations blur Creator/Creature distinctions. Divine spark is trapped in matter.
God is the only Savior	God is wholly other and not personally concerned or aware of us.	God is active in Israel's Redemption	We save ourselves through knowledge of the divine within us.	We participate in saving the world, and also God!

**Sephirot Chart from from The History of God, by Karen Armstrong, pp. 245-246**



*The Tree of the Sephiroth*

“...the sefiroth were both the names that God had given to himself and the means whereby he had created the world. Together these ten names formed his one great Name, which was not known to men. They represented the stages whereby En Sof had descended from his lonely inaccessibility to the mundane world. They are usually listed as follows:

1. Kether Elyon: the "Supreme Crown."
2. Hokhmah: "Wisdom."
3. Binah: "Intelligence."
4. Hesed: "Love" or "Mercy."
5. Din: "Power" (usually manifested in stern judgment).
6. Rakhmim: "Compassion"; sometimes called "Tifereth": "Beauty."
7. Netsakh: "Lasting Endurance."
8. Hod: "Majesty."
9. Yesod: "Foundation."
10. Malkuth: "Kingdom"; also called "Shekinah."

Sometimes the sefiroth are depicted as a tree, growing upside down with its roots in the incomprehensible depths of En Sof [see diagram] and its summit in the Shekinah, in the world. The organic image expresses the unity of this Kabbalistic symbol. En Sof is the sap that runs through the branches of the tree and gives them life, unifying them in a mysterious and complex reality. Although there is a distinction between En Sof and the world of his names, the two are one in rather the same way as a coal and a flame. The sefiroth represent the worlds of light that manifest the

darkness of En Sof, which remains in impenetrable obscurity. It is yet another way of showing that our notions of "God" cannot fully express the reality to which they point.

The world of the sefiroth is not an alternative reality "out there" between the Godhead and the world, however. They are not the rungs of a ladder between heaven and earth but underlie the world experienced by the senses. Because God is all in all, the sefiroth are present and active in everything that exists. They also represent the stages of human consciousness by which the mystic ascends to God by descending into his own mind. Yet again, God and man are depicted as inseparable. Some Kabbalists saw the sefiroth as the limbs of primordial man as originally intended by God.”

[Author’s Note: This arrangement given by Armstrong is one configuration. The Ayn Sof is above the chart and the creation is below. In the Chabad-Lubavitch scheme of things, Keter identified with the Or Ayn Sof, the Light of Ayn Sof, and the top three sefirot are Chochmah, Binah, and Daat, Wisdom, Knowledge and Understanding. Basically Daat takes the place of Keter as one ascends upward. That is where the acronym CHABAD comes from.]

## Notes:

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1. See Nash, Ronald, *The Gospel and the Greeks*, © 1992, 2003, P&R Publishing, Phillipsburg, NJ. Another resource is Snow, Eric V., *A Zeal for God Not According to Knowledge, A Refutation of Judaism's Arguments Against Christianity*, Writer's Club Press, New York, ©2003, [www.iuniverse.com](http://www.iuniverse.com). Snow specifically deals with the criticisms of Jewish writers like Hyam Maccoby. Snow is a less than orthodox "Christian" (he is a member of the Old line faction of Armstrong's Radio Church of God), but he wrote this book sensitive to Evangelical views. It is an extensive work, over 600 pages long!
2. See Matthew 5:17, 12:2-14, 15:1-6; Luke 11:52; John 7:15-24
3. Semper Reformata and Sola Scriptura
4. I want thank Westminster Seminary doctoral student Flavien Pardigon for this insight shared during a lunch meeting.
5. Frame, John, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*, © 1987, pp. 13-15, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, NJ
6. Van Til, Cornelius, *The Defense of the Faith* first edition page 11-12, Third Edition, © 1975, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phila., PA
7. Frame, *op cit*
8. Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1, p. 323, 1960 Edition, James Clarke and Co. LTD, London
9. Nash, Ronald H., *The Gospel and the Greeks*, p. 42, ©1992-2003, The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, Phillipsburg, NJ
10. Hodge, p. 325
11. Hodge, p. 326
12. Nash, p. 202-203
13. Robert McL. Wilson, "Gnostic Origins," *Vigilae Christianae*, 9 (1955): 208.
14. Armstrong, Karen, *A History of God*, p. 94-97, ©1993, Ballentine Books, New York
15. Nash, p. 208
16. Goldberg, Louis, *The Doctrine of the Trinity as Formulated by the Council of Nicea*, LJCE-NA1996, the paper available through [www.LCJE.net](http://www.LCJE.net)
17. Edersheim Alfred, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p. 30, ©1993, Hendrickson Publishers, Peabody, MA
18. Seltzer, Robert M. in *Jewish People, Jewish Thought*, ©1980 by the author, Macmillan Pub. Co. NY p. 213.

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19. *Ibid* p. 200
  20. *Ibid*, p. 202
  21. Armstrong, p. 212-213
  22. Scholem, Gershom, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 24, ©1991, Schocken Books, Inc. NY, NY
  23. *Ibid*, p. 34
  24. *Ibid*, p. 38
  25. *Ibid*, p. 158-159.
  26. Armstrong, p. 266
  27. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel is reported to have eaten large meals in order to release more divine sparks!
  28. I used the article on Gnosticism in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ©1967, Macmillan Pub. Co. & The Free Press, NY
  29. Of the Baal Shem Tov and the Maggid, two of the founding fathers of Hassidism, Foxbrunner says “God’s perfection, they intimated, consists not in eternal, changeless, self-contemplation but in a dynamic fullness of being (used as a verb, not a noun) that becomes progressively more perfect and encompasses every imaginable change and diversity, including emotions and even contradictions....God’s self-sufficiency is opposed by His recognizing that He is actually incomplete without us.” Foxbrunner, Roman A., *HABAD, The Hassidism of R. Shneur Zalman of Lylady*, ©1992 University of Alabama Press, Jason Aronson Inc. hardcover edition—1993, Northvale, NJ, p. 32. An attempt is made to deny that God changes, or at least to say it is only from our perspective that he does. Essentially this is an “economic” diversity within God rather than an “ontological” diversity. But, while it is affirmed, it still seems to contradict what is said about how the Sefirot are configured and re-configured. See *Mystical Concepts in Chassidism*, by Jacob Immanuel Schochet, ©1979 by the author, Kehot Publication Society, 1988 printing, pp. 64-65 and 141-142.