

II. Christianity

The so-called Christian Kabbalah emerged at the end of the 15th century, predominantly in Florence, at the initiative of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–1494). Christian Kabbalah should be expressly differentiated from Jewish Kabbalah. In Pico's eyes the Kabbalah and the *magia naturalis* are the most appropriate means to prove the truth of the Christian faith – particularly the dogmas of the Trinity and Christology. This could be demonstrated by appealing to the OT as well as to Jewish post-biblical writings. The basic goal of Christian Kabbalah is to trace back all forms of divine worship (*religio*) to a *prisca theologia* (ancient theology) and to smooth over theological, philosophical, and cultic differences with the help of a *concordantia* or *philosophia catholica*. This is similar to Christian hermeticism, shaped by Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499), and to early modern theosophy. This hegemonic hermeneutic of religious texts regards Christianity as a kind of super-religion, while at the same time elements of traditional teachings, especially those aspects of soteriology related to satisfaction and imputation, are transformed. In addition to Pico, Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522; *De verbo mirifico*, 1494, and *De arte cabalistica*, 1517), and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486?–1535; *De occulta philosophia*, 1510) are counted among the most significant authors. Particularly in Reuchlin's works, the interpretation of the Tetragrammaton YHWH as referring to Jesus (*Yeshu* or *Yeshu'ah*) by the insertion of the letter *shin* (YHŠWH) became an important approach of Christian Kabbalah to Scripture (for additional interpretations of the Tetragrammaton and the name of Jesus, see Wilkinson).

Moreover, the assumption of a secret divine meaning of the HB on the one hand, and the adoption of midrashic methodologies known from Jewish kabbalistic texts – like *gematria* (assigning letters numerical values), *temurah* (exchanging letters to create new words), and *notariqon* (anagrammatic techniques) – on the other hand, resulted in a new type of Christian exegesis. The *sensus mysticus* beyond the *sensus literalis* or *historicus* was identified with the kabbalistic meaning. In this way, kabbalistic authors not only undertook a christocentric reinterpretation of OT literal content, but also inserted a Christianized cosmogony and especially angelology into the texts, which had been especially developed, drawing on hermeticism and neoplatonism, and which often contained heterodox theological elements. Pico's *Heptaplus* and Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica* are early, striking examples of such interpretive efforts. In the works of authors who were influenced by Christian Kabbalah and hermeticism,

kabbalistic interpretation replaced Origen's fourfold meaning of Scripture. Reformation authors (e.g., Martin Luther) sometimes suspected that Origen's idea of the fourfold meaning of Scripture provided the background for kabbalistic interpretation; however, their rejection of kabbalistic interpretation was contradicted by other authors (e.g., Hieronymus Emser; 1478–1527) who referred to Reuchlin's work as a confirmation of the divine spirit, which was contained within the biblical text but also transcended it.

The motif of human beings' similarity to God due to their free will and their creative potential – countering anti-Pelagian Augustinian anthropology – was strengthened by Pico. This concept was especially adopted by hermetic, Christian-neoplatonic, and neo-Pythagorean influenced authors, e.g., John Colet (1467–1519), Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466–1536) and his followers, and others. Christology was transformed in these concepts – particularly with regard to the soteriological significance of the cross – but not abandoned. It seems as though Christian kabbalistic hermeneutics, the concept of *prisca theologia*, its understanding of human dignity, and semi-Pelagian anthropology served as a negative foil for Reformation authors' own anthropology and soteriology – this appears to be true especially for Luther. This contributed to a rather tenuous relationship between christocentric Reformation theology and Kabbalah (and Judaism in general). A positive reception of Christian kabbalistic literature is found only very occasionally, particularly in the works of Andreas Osiander (1498–1552).

Among the central motifs of early Christian Kabbalah are the teaching of the *En Sof*, pythagorean Christology, the theology of the divine name, the teaching of the *sefirot* (from Reuchlin onwards), the equation of Jesus Christ with the divine *Adam qadmon* (primordial man) or with a specific *sefirah* (especially the *shekhinah*) or with the Lurianic *Ze'ir anpin* (Aram. impatient, lit. “short face,” equivalent to the *sefirah Tiferet*, “Beauty”), the correspondence of macrocosm and microcosm, and the appreciation of language, particularly of the Hebrew language (*lingua adamica*) as an expression of divine creative power. Christian Kabbalah can be credited with giving decisive impulses towards the establishment of the academic study of the Hebrew language, but should also be recognized as part of the framework for missionizing the Jews. Nevertheless, Jewish converts played a special part in the field of Christian kabbalah, partly because of their translations from Hebrew sources, but also with regard to exegesis (see Wolfson). Sixteenth-century Christian kabbalistic authors of significance include Francesco Giorgio, Paolo Riccio, and Guillaume Postel, whose works predate the German variant of Christian Kabbalah as represented by Jakob Böhme's theosophy

and the Christian appropriation of Isaac Luria's newly envisioned Jewish Kabbalah by Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (*Kabbala denudata*). The last work in particular contributed to a broad reception of Jewish esoteric lore – either in a positive or a negative way – among Christian scholars and affected philosophical historiography. The *Kabbala denudata* included also Knorr von Rosenroth's kabbalistic approach to the NT (especially the Lord's prayer), and some works written by members of the so-called Cambridge Platonists, who had a crucial impact on the Christian kabbalistic interpretation of the Bible in England (Hessayon/Keene).

Inspired by Knorr von Rosenroth, Henry More, and especially Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont (1614–1699), the Christian Kabbalah enjoyed a revival at the end of the 17th century. It was received by the later so-called radical-pietistic circles around Johann Jakob Schütz (1640–1690; see Deppermann) and became one of the sources of inspiration for the Pietistic movement. Johann Georg Wächter (1663–1757), who, among others, rejected Spinoza's pantheism for its alleged atheism, also rejected the Kabbalah (and Judaism in general) as roots of these ideas. Johann Franz Budde (1667–1729), on the other hand, defended the Kabbalah by means of an historical interpretation and even incorporated kabbalistic teachings in his Lutheran theology (Otto). At the same time, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz also participated in the reception of kabbalistic literature (Coudert). Johann Christoph Wolf (1683–1739) focused on the Kabbalah as a field of research in 18th-century Hebrew Studies. By freeing the Jewish Kabbalah from the Christian hegemony of interpretation, Jakob Brucker (1696–1770) strengthened the historicization of both Christian and Jewish Kabbalah. On the other hand, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), combined Christian and Jewish Kabbalah with his programmatic eclectic Lutheran theosophy, which was dependent on Jakob Böhme and Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772; cf. Stengel 2012), and thereby established one of the most widely used reception bases which continued well into the 19th century. A decidedly historical new approach to Kabbalah was taken by Eliphaz Lévis (1810–1875), which understood itself as kabbalistic occultism.

Due to Knorr von Rosenroth's, Henry More's, and especially Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont's (1614–1699) interest in the Christian Kabbalah, it enjoyed a revival at the end of the 17th century. Later on, it was received by so-called radical-pietistic circles led by Johann Jakob Schütz (1640–1690; see Deppermann) and became one of the sources of inspiration for the Pietistic movement. Johann Georg Wächter (1663–1757), who, among others, rejected Spinoza's pantheism for its alleged atheism, also rejected the Kabbalah (and Judaism in general) considering it to be the root of Spinoza's ideas. Jo-

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In contrast to this approach, Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782) combined Christian and Jewish Kabbalah by means of his programmatic eclectic Lutheran theosophy, based on Jakob Böhme's and Emanuel Swedenborg's thought (1688–1772; cf. Stengel 2012), and thereby established one of the most widely used bases for the reception of Kabbalah which survived well on into the 19th century. A decidedly new historical and esoteric approach to Kabbalah was proposed by Eliphas Lévis (1810–1875), who considered himself to be a kabbalistic occultist.

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