

The Triune God

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Early in his first book the Tibetan states that “(T)he Central Light which we call a Deity, the one Ray of Divinity, manifests first as a Triplicity, and then as a Septenary.”¹ The notion of sevenfold manifestation is unfamiliar outside esoteric circles, but the threefold manifestation has echoed throughout human history in the trinitarian doctrines of numerous belief systems. The notion of a triune deity runs deep in human consciousness, reflecting triplicities both in ourselves and in the lower kingdoms. Observing the three-dimensionality of the physical world, Aristotle argued that “we make further use of the number three in the worship of the gods.”²

Ancient Egypt gave us the trinity of *Osiris, Isis* and *Horus*; the Chaldeans, *Anu, Ea* and *Bel*; the Celts, *Taulac, Fan* and *Mollac*; and the Teutons, *Odin, Frigg* and *Thor*, or possibly *Odin, Thor* and *Vanir*. A Roman trinity has been identified with *Jupiter, Mars* and *Quirinus*,³ and a Tibetan Buddhist one with *Amitabha, Avalokiteshvara* and *Mandjusri*.⁴ *Brahma, Vishnu* and *Shiva* appear in Hinduism; the *One, Spirit* and *Soul* in Plotinus’ Neoplatonism; the *Father, Son* and *Holy Spirit* in Christianity; and *Kether, Chokmah* and *Binah* in the Kabbalah. A pantheon of gods sometimes exists alongside the trinity, while in other systems the triplistic manifestation is reconciled with an overshadowing godhead as: “three in one.” But the Egyptian cult of Akhenaton, mainstream Judaism, Islam, and Unitarianism stand virtually alone among Indo-European religions in their insistence on a strict monotheism.

In their totality these diverse trinitarian belief systems tell a larger story. But what is that story, how consistent is it, and how does it relate to our own teachings? The present essay examines the similarities and differences in a sample of trinitarian theologies: Hinduism, Neoplatonism, Christianity, and the Kabbalah. It then attempts to synthesize them with teachings in the works of Helena Blavatsky, Alice Bailey, and other modern esoteric writers. The four theologies will first be discussed in turn.

The Hindu Trimurti

Hinduism asserts the existence of a supreme godhead, *Brahman* (Sanskrit: *äüœ*). The ancient Indian scriptures, the *Upanishads*, tell us that Brahman both permeates and transcends the universe, lying beyond any kind of rational description:

Brahman is he whom speech cannot express, and from whom the mind, unable to reach him, comes away baffled.⁵

Brahman is supreme; he is self-luminous, he is beyond all thought. Subtler than the subtlest is he, farther than the farthest, nearer than the nearest. He resides in the shrine of the heart of every being.⁶

The Rishis were fond of saying that Brahman should only be referred to by denials: he is “neither this, nor that,” *neti neti*. Negative descriptors of a similar type would be used extensively by medieval Islamic philosophers and by the Jewish Kabbalists.

From the supreme Brahman a divine *trimurti* emerges consisting of *Brahma* (*äüa*), *Vishnu* (*:[u]*), and *Shiva* (*izva*). The *trimurti* (*iÇmUit*) literally means “One with three forms.” The forms are equally divine manifestations of the Brahman:

The Lord God, though one without a second, assumes three forms respectively of *Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva* for creation, preservation and dissolution of the world.⁷

Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, though three in form, are one entity. No difference between the three exists except with respect to attributes.⁸

The *Puranas*, sacred texts attributed to the poet Vyasa, relate the trimurti's three forms to the elements of earth, water and fire. According to this symbolism, Brahma represents earth, and he was assigned the work of creating the universe. To assist him in this endeavour, he created the 10 *Prajapatis* (àjapit), fathers of the human race. Hinduism insists that to worship any of the three forms is to worship Brahman. Although Brahma has been neglected in this respect for many centuries, Vishnu and Shiva continue to attract large numbers of devotees.

Vishnu, the preserver, represents water. He is a benign, nurturing god who periodically sends avatars to earth to help humanity. The most famous one, Vishnu's 8th incarnation, was *Krishna* (k«:]). In the *Bagavad Gita*, Krishna—whose name means “the Christ”—comments: “I incarnate from time to time for protecting the good, for transforming the wicked, and for establishing *Dharma*, the world order.”⁹ Krishna served as charioteer to the hero *Arjuna* (AjuRn) in the battle of *Kurukshetra* which is seen as a prototype of humankind's struggle against the thrall of the lower vehicles, particularly the astral vehicle. The *Gita* also contains the oft-quoted statement in which Krishna speaks for the Supreme Being: “This entire universe is pervaded by Me, the unmanifest Brahman. All beings remain in Me.”¹⁰ Or in the translation favored by the Tibetan: “Having pervaded the whole universe with a fragment of Myself, I remain.”¹¹

Shiva, the destroyer, represents fire. In contrast to the benign Vishnu, Shiva is a stern ascetic responsible for suffering and the interminable cycle of death and rebirth. However, Shiva sees eventual redemption and joy through suffering, and in his ambiguities he represents all the polarities of the living world. Shiva is the male principle and acquires the power to destroy and recreate by collaborating with the corresponding female principle, *Shakti* (zi-).

The three persons of the Hindu trimurti are all male, but they have female consorts. Brahma's consort, *Vidya* (iv*a), is the promoter of knowledge and learning. Vishnu's is *Lakshmi* (luml), who personifies beauty, goodness, and prosperity. Shiva's consort takes various forms, including the bloodthirsty *Kali* (kil) whom Indian art depicts dancing on Shiva's breast.

The Neoplatonist Trinity

Plotinus (204-270 A.D.), founder of Neoplatonism, constructed a trinity whose aspects he called *The One*, *Spirit*, and *Soul*.¹² In contrast to the anthropomorphic Hindu trimurti, Plotinus' trinity is the epitome of abstract Greek philosophy. The three divine aspects are not equal but form a hierarchy of emanation; Spirit emanates from The One, and Soul from Spirit. The One or Unity is ineffable and totally beyond comprehension or description:

The Unity, is not a being, for so its unity would be vested in something else: strictly no name is apt to it, but since name it we must there is a certain rough fitness in designating it as unity with the understanding that it is not the unity of some other thing. Thus it eludes our knowledge, so that the nearer approach to it is through its offspring, Being: we know it as cause of existence to Intellectual-Principle, as fount of all that is best, as the efficacy which, self-perduring and undiminishing, generates all beings ... to all of which it must be prior.¹³

Plotinus represented The One by the point within the circle, the astrological sign of the sun. He likened it to the stone which causes ripples to spread throughout the pool.¹⁴ This insight may not have originated with Plotinus, but it would influence western metaphysics for the next 2,000 years.

Spirit or Mind (Greek: *Nous*, nous), is the divine intellect, “the Intellectual-Principle itself.” It is Unity's image of itself.

The Divine Mind in its mentation thinks itself; the object of the thought is nothing external: Thinker and Thought are one; therefore in its thinking and knowing it possesses itself, observes itself and sees itself...¹⁵

This concept of God's self-consciousness would have a major influence on the work of the Christian theologians Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas.

Soul (Psyche, *ψυχή*)—or “All-Soul” to distinguish it from the individual human soul—is the author of all living things. Soul is two-fold in its activity; one part looks back “in devotion” toward Spirit, while the other looks outward to the world which it creates.

(Soul) creates, then, on the model of the Ideas; for, what it has received from the Intellectual-Principle it must pass on in turn. In sum, then, the Intellectual-Principle gives from itself to the Soul of the All which follows immediately upon it: this again gives forth from itself to its next, illuminated and imprinted by it; and that secondary Soul at once begins to create... (It) overflows... and the image it gives forth, its last utterance towards the lower, will be the creative puissance.¹⁶

Plotinus' Spirit—both grammatically and in terms of polarity—is masculine, while Soul is feminine. Thus, the gender balance is maintained, Unity synthesizing both male and female.

The Christian Trinity

The Christian trinity consists of three “persons”: the *Father*, *Son*, and *Holy Spirit* (or *Holy Ghost*). The Council of Nicea (325 AD) affirmed, in what became known as the Nicene Creed, that

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, maker of all things visible and invisible, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, the only-begotten of his Father, of the substance of the Father, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father By whom all things were made, both which be in heaven and in earth. Who for us men and for our salvation came down [from heaven] and was incarnate and was made man. He suffered and the third day he rose again, and ascended into heaven. And he shall come again to judge both the quick and the dead. And (we believe) in the Holy Ghost.¹⁷

Augustine (354-430) traced the emerging trinitarian doctrine to scripture and responded to various heretical challenges. Among other things, he wrestled with the notion of “three in one”:

(T)he Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality... (T)hey are not three Gods, but one God... and so He who is the Father is not the Son; and... He who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, Himself also co-equal with the Father and the Son, and pertaining to the unity of the Trinity.¹⁸

From its inception, Christianity has asserted that Jesus Christ was the 2nd person of the trinity, pointing to the resurrection as proof of his divinity. In the New Testament, the Historic Christ identified himself as the “Son of Man;” but, 47 times, others—including Satan in the temptation scene—called him the “Son of God.” John, schooled in Greek philosophy, referred to him as “the Word” (Greek: *Logos*, *λογος*): “(T)he Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”¹⁹ Whereas Hinduism asserts that Krishna was one of several incarnations of Vishnu, Christianity emphasizes that Christ was the “only begotten” son.

Jesus Christ is the central focus of Christian devotion. His life, death and resurrection exemplified victory over the forces of evil and inspire the faithful to do likewise. Jesus is accessible, compas-

sionate and forgiving, intervening on their behalf—and perhaps protecting them from a remote, vengeful God the Father who resembles the Old Testament Jehovah. Only in the Marian cult within Catholicism and in the modern Pentecostal movement has devotion to Jesus faced serious competition.

But if Christianity is clear about the 2nd person of the trinity, it has struggled with the nature and function of the 3rd person. In the *Acts of the Apostles*, the risen Christ promised that his disciples “shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost... and shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you”.²⁰ Soon thereafter, at the first Pentecost, we are told:

(S)uddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.²¹

“Holy Ghost” translates the Greek *hagios pneuma* (αγιοη πνευμα), literally “Holy Breath,” while “Spirit” is simply *pneuma* (πνευμα). In the Gospel of John, the Holy Spirit is described as *parakletos* (παρακλητος), the “paraclete” or “comforter.”

The original version of the Nicene Creed, quoted above, mentioned the Holy Spirit without comment, almost as an afterthought. But later the creed was amended to clarify the nature of the 3rd person:

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and giver of life:
Who proceedeth from the Father *and the Son* (Latin: Qui ex Patre, *Filioque* procedit).
Who together with the Father and Son is adored and glorified.
Who spake by the Prophets.

Whether the Holy Spirit proceeds from the 1st person or jointly from the 1st and 2nd persons might seem of minor significance, but the *Filioque* clause sharply divided the western and eastern churches. The Eastern Orthodox churches insisted that the clause was ascriptural and that God the Father is the single source of both the Son and the Holy Ghost. However, both agreed that the Holy Spirit is consubstantial with the Father and the Son and is related to one or both by a process of “spiration.” Spiration contrasts with “filiation” by which the Son proceeds from the Father.

Despite such attempts at doctrinal clarification, the 3rd person remains a somewhat mysterious figure. On the one hand, a sin against the Holy Spirit is regarded as unforgivable.²² On the other, the Holy Spirit is seen as the aspect of God immanent in this world, in people, and in the church. He was sent by the Christ to be an advocate or helper for the faithful in their struggles. Importantly, the Holy Spirit is the source of the gifts of *charismata*, or “manifestations of the Spirit.” Paul explained:

For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;
To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;
To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits;
to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:
But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.²³

The gifts of the Holy Spirit inspire the Pentecostal, or charismatic, movement which has attracted large numbers of adherents throughout the world. Following in the footsteps of ecstatic movements in Kriya Yoga, Sufism, and Hasidic Judaism, Pentecostal churches offer what their members claim is a direct experience of God. Exuberant singing, dancing, healing, glossolalia (speaking in tongues), prophecy, and being “slain in the spirit” form the basis of their services. Important to charismatics is

the event or process known as “baptism of the Holy Spirit,” a conversion or post-conversion experience in which an individual gains the ability to speak in tongues.²⁴

Many people have criticized Christianity for patriarchal bias, complaining among other things that it offers only male aspects of God. Of the three persons of the trinity, two are most certainly male, and the third is at best neuter and probably male also. The angel told Joseph: “(F)ear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the *Holy Ghost*.”²⁵ In other words, the Holy Spirit was the true father of Jesus. Furthermore, the word “parakletos” happens to be masculine.²⁶ In contrast to Hinduism, Christianity even denied consorts to its male trinity.

Actually, the criticism of gender bias falls most harshly to the western church. In the east, a feminine face of God is at least faintly discernible. Theophilus, 2nd-century Bishop of Antioch—who, incidentally was first to use the term “trinity” (τριάδοϋ)—described the trinity in terms of *Theos* (θεοϋ), *Logos* (λογοϋ), and *Sophia* (σοφια).²⁷ Sophia, or “Wisdom,” is feminine, as is its Hebrew equivalent *Ruach* (רוח).²⁸

Sophia continues to be revered in Eastern Orthodox churches, and recently she has caught the attention of western feminist theologians. She may be Christianity’s best approximation to a goddess, and a body of teaching and rituals has developed around her.²⁹ Treating the Holy Spirit as a female aspect of deity may restore gender symmetry. Perhaps the 3rd person is, in some sense, the *mother* rather than the father of the 2nd. But such an interpretation is hard to reconcile with the church fathers’ insistence that the Holy Spirit was the last in the procession of persons from the godhead.

The notion of a god with both male and female aspects harks back to pagan beliefs, but it has opened up new insights in modern Christianity. Mary Baker Eddy (1821-1910), founder of Christian Science, popularized the salutation “Father-Mother God,” which is now widely used in the devotional practices of liberal Christian denominations. Several Protestant denominations have revised their liturgies to use gender-inclusive pronouns. And Dominican theologian Matthew Fox is an unabashed feminist in his references to the deity.³⁰

For much longer the cult of Mary has resembled goddess worship, although the Catholic Church’s official position is that she is not worshipped but merely “revered.” Nevertheless, as early as 431 AD, the Council of Ephesus proclaimed that Mary was “*Theotokos* (θεοτοκοϋ), the Mother of God, in the true sense of the word.” It argued that Mary, indisputably the mother of Jesus, who was both God and man, must consequently be the mother of God. However, the Church has avoided too close an examination of how the mother of God can avoid being herself divine.

The Supernals of the Kabbalah

The body of teaching known as the *Kabbalah* originated in Judaism no later than medieval times and perhaps as early as the Old Testament period.³¹ More recently esoteric students of other persuasions have embraced it, and the “Hermetic Kabbalah” contains many Christian concepts.

The Kabbalah teaches that the whole of manifestation emanates from an absolute, unknowable godhead, comparable to the Hindu Brahman. However, the godhead is not quite unknowable, it is triplistic in nature, consisting of three “veils,” the *Ain* (Hebrew: אֵין), “the Negative One;” the *Ain Soph* (אֵין סוֹפ), “Limitless Expansion;” and the *Ain Soph Aur* (אֵין סוֹפ אוֹר), “Limitless Light.” Negative existence is to be understood in the sense of the *neti neti* of Hinduism.

The emanations from the godhead, describing the descent into manifestation, are ten in number and referred to as the *sephiroth* (סְפִירוֹת). Like Plotinus, the Kabbalists believed that the divine energy cascades from one aspect of divinity to the next. As one *sephirah* fills, like a bowl, it overflows to fill the next lower one. The sephiroth traditionally are represented on a glyph or chart called the “Tree of Life.” The Tree has three columns or “pillars,” associated with the qualities of severity,

mildness, and mercy. The sephiroth on the middle Pillar of Mildness resolve or equilibrate the opposing forces on the other two pillars.

The first three sephiroth: *Kether*, *Chokmah*, and *Binah*, collectively called the “supernals,” constitute a divine trinity. *Kether* (כֶּתֶר), at the top of the Pillar of Mildness, is the first emanation from the threefold Ain. *Kether*, “the Crown,” is primal glory, pure being, pure becoming. Each of the sephiroth is associated with a particular divine name, and *Kether* is associated with *Eheieh* (אֶהְיֶה), “I Am,” as in “I Am That I Am.” In the *Zohar*, one of the earliest Kabbalistic texts, *Kether* is called the Most High, the Ancient of Ancients, the Ancient of Days.³² Consistent again with Plotinus, it is symbolized by the “point within the circle.”

The second emanation is *Chokmah* (חֻכְמָה). *Chokmah*, which resides at the top of the right-hand Pillar of Mercy, is interpreted as “wisdom.” *Chokmah*, pure energy, activity or life, is the Supernal Father, the primal male principle, and his divine name is *Yaweh* (יְהוָה). *Chokmah* is symbolized by the line, the rod of power.

Binah (בִּינָה), the third emanation, which resides atop the left-hand Pillar of Severity, is usually interpreted as “understanding,” but a better translation might be “insight” or “gnosis.” *Binah* is primordial form, the primal female principle, the Supernal Mother, or the alchemists’ Virgin Mother. *Binah*’s divine name is *Yaweh Elohim* (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים). “Elohim,” a plural word of ambiguous gender, is translated as “God” or “the Lord” in the Old Testament. Another of *Binah*’s names is *Marah* (מַרְהַ), which can be translated as “the sea” but also is the root of the name “Mary.” *Binah* is symbolized by the vertical cross or the circle.

Chokmah and *Binah*, into which the divine energy of *Kether* differentiates, are the first pair of opposites. They are complementary and essential to each other because phenomenal existence requires the pure energy of *Chokmah* to be resisted by the primordial form of *Binah*.³³ In the Kabbalah, the male energy and the female form are present at the highest level of deity.

If *Chokmah* and *Binah* correspond to the Father and Mother—with *Kether* lying above both—an emanation corresponding to God the Son is conspicuously absent from the Kabbalistic trinity. The Son is often associated with the 6th sephirah, *Tiphareth* (תִּפְאֶרֶת), the sacrificed god or, in the Hermetic Kaballah, “Christ on the Cross.” However, descriptions of *Tiphareth* resemble Jesus rather than the Christ, and God the Son could perhaps be associated with a hidden, unnumbered sephirah, *Daath* (דַּעַת), which overshadows *Tiphareth*. *Daath*, interpreted as “knowledge,” lies on the “abyss” which separates the supernals from the seven lower sephiroth.

An early Kabbalistic text, the *Sepher Yetzirah*, links *Kether* to the Holy Spirit:

The first of the Sephiroth, one, is the Spirit of the living God. Voice, Spirit and Word, this is the Holy Spirit. Two (*Chokmah*) is the breath of the Spirit... Three (*Binah*) is the water which comes from the breath, and with it He sculpted primary matter...³⁴

This passage is interesting, although “Holy Spirit,” “Breath,” and “Word” do not seem to have their Christian meanings. Modern kabbalists suggest that the Holy Spirit may correspond to the 9th sephirah, *Yesod* (יְסוּד), “foundation,” or in its feminine form to the 10th sephirah, *Malkuth* (מַלְכוּת), “the kingdom.”³⁵ Jewish tradition identifies *Malkuth* with the feminine force *Shekinah* (שְׁכִינָה).

Importantly, all ten sephiroth are regarded as divine emanations.

The three supernals of the Kabbalah, and indeed the remaining seven sephiroth, have been the focus of intense intellectual, mystical and occult attention. But, in contrast to the persons of the Hindu and Christian trinities, they are remote and abstract, like the aspects of Plotinus’ deity. The supernals are not interested in human individuals, and no cult of devotion has grown up around them.

Synthesis With Esoteric Teachings

In *The Secret Doctrine*, Helena Blavatsky outlines the triune manifestation of the Deity from an ineffable Absolute:

- (1) The ABSOLUTE; the *Parabrahm* of the Vedantins of the one Reality, SAT, which is, as Hegel says, both Absolute Being and Non-Being.
- (2) The first manifestation, the impersonal, and in philosophy, *unmanifested* Logos, the precursor of the “manifested.” This is the “First Cause,” the “Unconscious” of European Pantheists.
- (3) Spirit-matter, LIFE; the “Spirit of the Universe,” the Purusha and Prakriti, or the *second* Logos.
- (4) Cosmic Ideation, MAHAT or Intelligence, the Universal World-Soul; the Cosmic Noumenon of Matter, the basis of the intelligent operations in an of Nature, also called MAHA-BUDDHI.³⁶

Subsequent writers in the Theosophical Society and elsewhere attached the terms “First Logos” to “The first manifestation” and “Third Logos” to “Cosmic Ideation.”³⁷ The Tibetan associates the 1st Logos with Life, Will, and Purpose, the 2nd with Consciousness and Love-Wisdom, and the 3rd with Form and Active Intelligence.³⁸

There are obvious similarities between Blavatsky’s Absolute and the ineffable godhead found in Hinduism and the Kabbalah. And the three Logoi have much in common with the Hindu, Kabbalistic, and Neoplatonic trinities. Plotinus would recognize his Spirit and Soul in *The Secret Doctrine*, and the notions of life and form correlate closely with Kabbalistic terminology. The 19th century Kabbalist Eliphas Levi described Binah in terms of “creative intelligence,”³⁹ which strongly resembles the Tibetan’s “active intelligence.” Plotinus and the Kabbalists would agree with Blavatsky that the source of the created universe is the 3rd aspect, while in Hinduism and Christianity it is the 1st. In the Tibetan’s teachings, the 1st aspect is the destroyer of forms, whereas that function is assigned to Shiva in Hinduism. The enumeration may not be the same, but the images are similar.

The energies of the three Logoi are depicted, respectively, as positive, equilibrated, and negative. Comparable energies are found on the three pillars of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, although “negative energy” must not be confused with the “negative existence” of the Ain. “Positive” correlates with the masculine Chockmah, which lies on the Pillar of Mercy, while “negative” correlates with feminine Binah, which lies on the Pillar of Severity.

A concept developed at considerable length in the Tibetan’s teachings is cosmic fire, the energy of *manas*, or mind. From this perspective, the three Logoi are associated, respectively, with *Electric Fire*, *Solar Fire*, and *Fire by Friction*.⁴⁰ They reside on the first three subplanes of the solar logoi plane, the “Sea of Fire,” which in its totality comprises the first cosmic etheric subplane. Cosmic fire is personified in the Hindu deity *Agni* (Aṅg):

Agni is the sumtotal of that portion of the logoi ego which is reflected down into His physical vehicle; He is the life of the logoi personality... He is to the solar Logos on His own plane what the coherent personality of a human being is to his Ego in the causal body.⁴¹

The Tibetan correlates the three Logoi with the three persons of the Christian trinity: the 1st Logos with the Father, the 2nd with the Son, and the 3rd with the Holy Spirit. The first two correlations seem to flow easily. In particular, the 2nd Logos, the Love-Wisdom aspect, shares important characteristics with the 2nd person of the Christian trinity⁴² and also with Vishnu, the 2nd form of the Hindu trimurti. Esoterically, the number two symbolizes the duality of spirit and matter, and in both

Hinduism and Christianity it is the 2nd aspect of deity that intervenes by sending avatars to earth.⁴³ The Christian doctrine of the Christ is complemented by Hindu and modern esoteric teachings in which the Christ is referred to as the *Lord Maitreya*, the *Bodhisattva*, the World Teacher, and Head of the Hierarchy.⁴⁴ The Historic Christ, who overshadowed the Master Jesus, was the Avatar of Love, representative of the Cosmic Christ. Through rapid spiritual development the Christ became the first member of the human race to attain the exalted initiation by the Lords of Sirius and, as a result, has been able to perform unique service to humanity.⁴⁵

On the other hand, there is considerable tension between the 3rd Logos, the aspect of Active Intelligence, and Christianity's Holy Spirit. Esoterically, the 3rd aspect links God and creation, the divine activity in space and time. Plotinus recognized this link, and Christianity emphasizes the Holy Spirit's involvement with humanity as the paraclete. But Christianity has never acknowledged the Spirit's responsibility for creation. Theophilus and today's feminist theologians have suggested that the 3rd person of the trinity has feminine characteristics, and in the Holy Spirit/Sophia/Virgin Mary, as well as in Binah/Marah and the Hindu Shiva/Shakti, we may have the seeds of further theological investigation.

We can equate the supernals of the Kabbalah to the three Logoi. But do the lower seven sephiroth correspond to "the divine manifestation as a septenary?" The lower sephiroth emanate from Binah, the 3rd aspect—or perhaps we could say that Binah is the synthesizing center for them. Significantly, Binah's divine name refers to the Elohim, who by tradition are seven in number and often identified with the seven Spirits before the throne. In a rare reference to the Kabbalah, the Tibetan, relates the lower sephiroth to the seven Rishis of the Great Bear, the seven planetary Logoi, and the seven Kumaras of the earth system.⁴⁶ He relates all 10 sephiroth to Brahma's Prajapatis. French Kabbalist Gérard Encausse (Papus) also interprets the sephiroth in Hindu terms.⁴⁷

The degree of consistency among the four trinitarian theologies we have considered, and between them and the works of Helena Blavatsky and Alice Bailey, is striking. The consistency can be explained in part by contacts among scholars. The Kabbalah and Neoplatonism shared middle-eastern origins and evolved within the same milieu of western esotericism. And Plotinus' influence on Augustine and Aquinas has already been noted. The *Secret Doctrine* built upon eastern philosophical concepts and terminology. And the most influential modern Kabbalists, including MacGregor Mathers, Papus, Dion Fortune, and Aleister Crowley, had close contacts with Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society. In fact, we tend to view the Kabbalah through the lens of late-19th-, early-20th-century metaphysics that also influenced Blavatsky and Bailey. On the other hand, the Kabbalah already had a long history, and the similarities between the early Kabbalah and Hinduism are harder to explain. They point to factors in human consciousness and the evolution of ideas that transcend physical-plane contacts.

Conclusion

Over time and across diverse cultures, humanity has found it appropriate and necessary to speak of God in trinitarian terms. The descriptions of the three aspects of deity and their mutual relationship vary, and there is no one-to-one correspondence between the divine aspects in different belief systems. In some cases, such as Hinduism, the images are anthropomorphic, while in others, like Neoplatonism and the Kabbalah, they are more abstract and arcane. Knowledge of the trinity has sometimes been restricted to scholars or high initiates, while in Christianity it is taught to the masses. Nevertheless, the images are remarkably consistent and lead almost irresistibly to descriptions of the three Logoi in esoteric works published over the last 125 years.

The various trinitarian theologies provide a cultural tapestry supporting and enlightening our own teachings. They represent attempts by the world's most insightful people to express, in rational

terms, impressions of the divine nature received from higher levels of consciousness, internal or external. These people struggled, as we still do, to capture aspects of truth on the borderline between what can be known by the human mind and what forever will be unknowable. Humanity depends on revelation for its knowledge of the divine nature, but we must provide the forms, intellectual and otherwise, to express that knowledge. Therein lies the challenge facing all who accept the responsibilities of esoteric teaching in an age of increasingly active revelation. We are indebted to the many individuals and groups who developed the rich array of forms we already have to depict the triune God.

Meanwhile, we strive to make the trinity come alive, to allow Life to flow into the various intellectual forms or, indeed, into the synthesized form that seems to be emerging. For Matthew Fox, the trinity celebrates a reality that is “unfolding, pulsating, passionate, loving, creating, breathing, (and) spiraling.”⁴⁸ And it sheds a similar light on the other triplicities in the world and ourselves. We are three-fold beings too, expressing in our small way the same Light, Love and Power expressed by the infinite deity. What we already know of the trinity gives us ample cause to rejoice and offer praise. What we do not yet know invites us to continue our search for truth and, through this work of service, to raise human consciousness toward its divine prototype.

¹ Alice Bailey. *Initiation Human and Solar*. Lucis, 1922, p. 3.

² Aristotle. *On the Heavens*, i, 2. 350 BC. (Translated by J. L. Stocks.)

³ Robert Graves (Ed.). *New Larousse Encyclopedic of Mythology*. Hamlyn, 1968, p. 252.

⁴ Annie Besant. *Esoteric Christianity*. Theosophical Publishing House, 1901, p. 176.

⁵ *Tattiriya Upanishad*. II, 4. (Translated by Swami Prahavananda.)

⁶ *Mandaka Upanishad*. III, i, 7. (Swami Prahavananda.) The name *Parabrahm* is sometimes given to the ineffable Brahman.

⁷ *Vishnu Purana*. (Swami Prahavananda.) *Brahma*, the creator, is not to be confused with the ineffable Brahman.

⁸ *Padma Purana*. (Swami Prahavananda.)

⁹ *Bhagavad Gita*. Verses 4.07-08. (Translated by Ramanand Prasad.)

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, verse 9.04.

¹¹ Alice A. Bailey. *Externalization of the Hierarchy*. Lucis, 1957, p. 592.

¹² Although Plotinus is usually said to have founded Neoplatonism, his teacher (and Church Father Origen's) Ammonias Saccas may be the actual founder. See, for example, Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, Touchstone, 1945.

¹³ Plotinus. *Sixth Ennead*, 6th Tractate, AD 250. (Translated by Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page.)

¹⁴ Karen Armstrong. *A History of God*. Ballentine, 1993, p. 102-3.

¹⁵ Plotinus. *Second Ennead*, 2nd Tractate, AD 250. (Stephen MacKenna and B. S. Page.)

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 3rd Tractate.

¹⁷ *The Seven Ecumenical Councils*, ed. H. Percival. Charles Scribners, 1990, vol XIV, p. 3.

¹⁸ Augustine of Hippo. *On the Trinity*. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, I, Charles Scribners, 1990.

¹⁹ *John* 1:14 (KJV).

²⁰ *Acts* 1: 6,8 (KJV).

²¹ *Acts* 2: 2-4 (KJV).

²² “The Holy Ghost.” *Catholic Encyclopedia*. Jacques Maritain Center, 1998.

²³ *1 Corinthians* 12: 9-11 (KJV).

²⁴ Margaret Poloma. *The Charismatic Movement*. Twayne, 1982, p. 9.

²⁵ *Matthew* 1: 19 (KJV).

²⁶ Robert Graves. *The White Goddess*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1948, p. 157.

²⁷ Theophilus of Antioch. *Works*, Book 2, Chapter 15. *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II.

²⁸ Hebrew text is written from right to left. Thus “Ruach” is written *cheth vau resh* (רוח).

²⁹ Susan Cody, Marian Ronan and Hal Taussig. *Wisdom's Feast*. Harper & Row, 1986.

³⁰ Matthew Fox. *Original Blessing*. Bear & Co., 1983

³¹ The English word is also written as “Kabalah,” “Qabalah,” “Quabalah,” or “Cabala.”

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- ³² S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*. Arkana, 1926.
- ³³ Dion Fortune. *The Mystical Qabalah*. Ibis, 1935, p. 44.
- ³⁴ Papus, *Op. cit.*, pp. .
- ³⁵ Dion Fortune. *Op. cit.*, p. 51.
- ³⁶ H. P. Blavastsky. *The Secret Doctrine*. Theosophical Publishing Company, 1888, p. 16.
- ³⁷ For example, Annie Besant. *A Study in Consciousness*. Theosophical Publishing House, 1904, 3-7.
- ³⁸ Alice A. Bailey. *Treatise on Cosmic Fire*. Lucis, 1925, p. 3.
- ³⁹ Papus. *The Qabalah*. Samuel Weiser, 1977, pp. .
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 603,
- ⁴² Christianity associates the term “Logos” solely with the 2nd person, whereas the Tibetan and other esoteric writers treat it as synonymous with “God.”
- ⁴³ Alice A. Bailey. *The Reappearance of the Christ*. Lucis, p. 11.
- ⁴⁴ C. W. Leadbeater. *The Masters and the Path*. Theosophical Publishing House, 1925, pp. 295-96, 313-315.
- ⁴⁵ John Berges. *Sacred Vessel of the Mysteries*. Planetnetwork Press, pp. 169-79.
- ⁴⁶ Alice A. Bailey. *Treatise on Cosmic Fire*. Lucis, p. 692.
- ⁴⁷ Papus. *Op. cit.*, pp. 180-181.
- ⁴⁸ Matthew Fox. *Op. cit.*, p. 214.