

# Themes in Western Esotericism

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## Summary

Certain themes run through the western esoteric tradition, affording coherence to what would otherwise be a collection of disconnected movements, institutions, teachings and practices. The themes discussed herein are the nature of God and man, formal communities and group consciousness, ritual, the initiatory path, and the broad quest for transformation. During the period of interest, western esotericism emphasized the present lifetime, leaving little room for belief in reincarnation.

This article's primary focus is on esotericism in Europe from the beginning of the Common Era to the end of the nineteenth century, though the ancient mysteries and modern esoteric teachings are mentioned when they shed light on the period of interest. The article examines the esoteric dimensions of Christianity and Judaism as well as the important esoteric movements that arose on the fringes of, and outside, institutional religion.

## Introduction

The synthesis of western and eastern esotericism, since 1875, has been so successful and profound that we have no hesitation in using terms like Christ and the Lord Maitreya, ether and akasha, maya and glamour, or soul and wheel of rebirth in the same sentence. The richness of modern esotericism stems in large measure from the ability to draw upon terminology, concepts, and spiritual practices from multiple traditions.

We should not forget, however, that the West had its own, distinctive esoteric tradition that was the sole source of answers and the inspiration for millions of people who made great spiritual progress. The western esoteric tradition is not only historically important, it can also give us new insights and enrich our perspectives on today's synthetic esotericism.

Western esotericism is a vast field whose timeframe could extend from Atlantis to the present and whose scope could range from primitive fertility rituals and sorcery, to the Kabbalah, the Grail legends, Rosicrucianism, astrology, ritual magic, the sacraments, and mysticism. It could also include mystical and speculative theology, which overlap with esoteric philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

While this article briefly touches upon pre-Christian esotericism and occasionally mentions modern esotericism, its primary focus is on the period from the beginning of the Common Era, through the end of the nineteenth century. "Western esotericism" is defined as the esotericism of Europe, including Russia, and the countries which, through colonial expansion or otherwise, adopted European cultures. Israel/Palestine and Egypt are included to the extent that their esoteric traditions fed into those of the West. Further studies would be welcomed to expand this timeframe and scope.

Religion is an unavoidable component in a study of this nature. Just as the eastern esoteric tradition is bound up inextricably with Hinduism and Buddhism, the western tradition cannot be separated from Judaism and Christianity. Christianity has dominated European history for two millennia, yet Judaism preceded it and has continued to play important religious and cultural roles.

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## About the Author

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Christianity and Judaism both have significant esoteric dimensions. But esotericism attaches more significance to universals than to particulars and can be perceived as threatening by religious authorities entrusted with preserving the unique beliefs and practices of their respective traditions. As a result, religious authorities have often been suspicious of the esotericism in their own midst and have taken strong, even fanatical, measures to suppress what lay outside. Major expressions of esotericism were pushed to the fringes of institutional religion—or into secret societies beyond their reach—resulting in large-scale fragmentation of the western esoteric tradition.

Despite the fragmentation, certain pervasive themes can be identified extending across multiple segments of western esotericism:

- The nature of God
- The human constitution
- Formal communities and group consciousness
- Ritual practices
- The initiatory path
- Transformation
  - The Eucharist
  - Alchemy
  - Transformation of consciousness

In each case, we shall examine the emergence of the theme and evaluate its strength and weakness. An earlier article, “Occult Orders in Western Esotericism,” focused on the structure of esotericism, but it identified a number of coherent patterns among occult orders, fraternities and societies. They included the purposeful use of symbolism and ceremony; discipline, mutual bonding, and collective consciousness; and goals of self-transformation and initiation.<sup>2</sup> Those patterns are incorporated into the themes discussed herein and examined in greater detail. The present article’s scope also extends to pervasive beliefs, and it includes more aspects of institutional Christianity and Judaism.

A theme of major importance, but confined to *Christian* esotericism, is the nature and person of Jesus Christ. It was discussed at length in another article, “Christology: Toward a Synthesis of Christian Doctrine and Esoteric Teach-

ings.”<sup>3</sup> Mainstream Christian teachings emphasize the singularity of his person and the hypostatic union of his divine and human natures; they also assume that the union is eternal. Yet suggestions were made from the first-century onward that the historic “Jesus Christ” involved two individualities whose union—perhaps described well by the doctrine of hypostatic union—was intended to last only during the three-year Palestinian mission. Modern esoteric teachings support that suggestion. The topic will not be discussed further herein, but interested readers are referred to the “Christology” article.

No suggestion is made that the themes identified in this article are the only ones that might be discerned. Rather, they are selected because they are so conspicuous and pervasive as to factor into our fundamental understanding of western esotericism. Along with the topics discussed in the two previous articles, they capture the broad dimensions of western esoteric teachings.

Belief in reincarnation never gained traction in western esotericism during the period under consideration. Such belief was common in ancient Greek and other cultures, but it was opposed by both institutional Christianity and institutional Judaism. Surprisingly, however, reincarnation was only rarely discussed outside their bounds. Brief comments will be made on this “missing theme” and possible reasons for its weakness.

## The Triune God

An important theme in western esotericism is the notion of a transcendent Godhead that manifests or reveals itself in intermediate forms comprehensible by the human mind. One way it does so is through trinities of gods or divine “persons.” In ancient Egypt many gods were grouped in threes, the best-known being Osiris, Isis, and their son Horus. Even the sun god Rā was sometimes grouped with Khepera and Temu: Khepera representing the rising sun, Rā the midday sun, and Temu the setting sun.<sup>4</sup>

Biblical Judaism affirmed strict monotheism: belief in YHVH, father of the Jewish people.<sup>5</sup> Yet it acknowledged that YHVH revealed himself in various ways, including the divine *Ruach* (“Breath,” “Wind,” or “Spirit”), even *Ruach ha-*

*Kodesh* (“the Holy Spirit”).<sup>6</sup> The transcendent glory of God, *Kavod*, was sometimes viewed as a divine manifestation, as was the *Shekinah*, discussed in rabbinic Judaism.<sup>7</sup> The *Shekinah* was the indwelling presence of God, found in the holiest of places or even in the hearts of the righteous. *Chokmah* (“Wisdom”) became a divine feminine personage in the Wisdom literature of late biblical Judaism.<sup>8</sup> *Chokmah*’s direct Greek equivalent is *Sophia*, similarly personified in Eastern Orthodox teachings and in modern feminist theology. *Ruach*, *Shekinah* and *Chokmah* are all grammatically feminine, while *YHVH* was masculine in the ordinary sense of the word.

The early Greeks may have been polytheistic, but their gods and goddesses were organized in a hierarchical pantheon. Zeus occupied the highest position on Mount Olympus, and other deities were subject to him. Belief in the Olympian deities declined over the centuries, and some philosophers began to regard abstract qualities like rationality as more important than anthropomorphic deities. Plato (c.424–c.347 BCE) conceived of the *Form* (Greek: *Eidos*), an eternal, perfect archetype. Every created thing was the imperfect, temporal shadow of a related Form. An important Form was “the Good,” a divine or semi-divine quality. The Sun was the offspring, or physical manifestation, of the Good.<sup>9</sup> Importantly, Plato also taught that an underlying “threeness” pervaded the whole of reality, and that concept stimulated the development of Christian trinitarian doctrine several centuries later.

Greek philosophy also produced the notion of the *Logos*. First discussed by the sixth-century BCE Heraclitus, the term *logos* acquired a range of meanings, including “ratio,” “proportion,” “harmony,” “reason,” even “idea.” Plato regarded the *logos* as the Idea–Form behind knowledge or discourse, and in his Platonic dialogues Socrates claimed that the *logos* spoke through him. The fourth-century BCE Zeno the Stoic viewed the *logos* as a divine principle of natural law and rational ethics. His followers came to regard the *Logos*—now appropriately capitalized—as the soul of the universe. Still later, Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria (20 BCE–50 CE) viewed the *Logos* as a god-

man in the style of the Egyptian Osiris.<sup>10</sup> In his work and elsewhere, the *Logos* came to be considered the mediator between heaven and earth.<sup>11</sup>

The *Gospel of John* identified the *Logos* with Christ,<sup>12</sup> affirming that he revealed the hidden nature and purpose of the Father. By that time, Christ was already revered as the Son of God, a term not unfamiliar to Jews. For Christians, Christ—God incarnate in human form—provided the supreme example of a divine manifestation to which the faithful could relate. He preached a transformative message, sacrificed himself on the cross to redeem humanity, and rose again in glory to return to the Father.

When the gospels were written, however, notions of a trinity were still more than a century away. The Holy Spirit that descended on the apostles at Pentecost was understood in the Judaic sense of *Ruach ha-Kodesh*.

Christian trinitarian doctrine emerged at a time when the proto-institutional church was becoming increasingly Greek in outlook. Platonic threeness urged the construction of a trinity. The Father, of whom Christ had spoken, conveniently filled one position, and Christ himself, the Son, another. But no obvious candidate was waiting to fill the third position in the trinity. Eventually, two candidates were nominated. Theophilus, bishop of Antioch (c.117–c.181 CE) proposed *Sophia*,<sup>13</sup> and his successor Paul of Samosata (200–275) agreed. Platonist philosopher Athenagoras of Athens (c.133–c.190) proposed *Pneuma Hagion* (“Holy Spirit”), the direct Greek equivalent of *Ruach ha-Kodesh*.

Both candidates had scriptural support, but Athenagoras’ had the advantage of its appearance at Pentecost, deemed to have been the birth event of Christianity. The *Pneuma Hagion* was selected, creating the now-familiar trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Much work remained, however, to flesh out a robust trinitarian doctrine. Just one challenge was to explain how the impersonal *Ruach ha-Kodesh* could be placed in the same category as the anthropomorphic Father and Son, and some commentators would argue that this has still not been accomplished. Other challenges were to explain the relationship among the trinitarian

components, how they came into being, and how they related to the fundamental essence of Deity.

Choice of the *Pneuma Hagion* eliminated any hope of gender balance, grammatical or otherwise, in the trinity. Whereas *Sophia* and *Ruach* were feminine nouns, *Pneuma* was neuter; and its Latin form *Spiritus Sanctus* was masculine.<sup>14</sup> Institutional Christianity offered a trinity consisting of two obviously masculine components and a third that was at best neuter. The opportunity to include *Sophia* as a divine Mother, comparable with the Egyptian *Isis*, was lost.<sup>15</sup>

Gnosticism, which flourished during the second and third centuries in competition with proto-institutional Christianity, envisioned an utterly transcendent Godhead from which emanated lesser divine beings intermediate between the *Pleroma*, or Heaven World, and the everyday world in which we live. Those beings sometimes came in complementary pairs, one of which consisted of the *Logos* and *Sophia*. Notions of dualistic emanations would influence the Judaic Kabbalah but had no impact on institutional Christianity. Rather, the latter influenced Gnosticism. The *Tripartite Tractate*, an anonymous third- or early fourth-century Gnostic text, spoke of the Father, Son and Spirit.<sup>16</sup>

Independently of both the institutional church and Gnosticism, Plotinus (c.204–270 CE), chief spokesperson of the early Neoplatonists, built on Platonic threeness to construct a hierarchical trinity of *Monas* (“the One”), *Nous* (“Divine Mind”), and *Psyche* (“World Soul”). The two latter were successive emanations from the *Monas*, and in a further process of emanation *Psyche* birthed the manifest universe. *Monas* was understood to be presexual, *Nous* was masculine, and *Psyche* feminine. In contrast to its Christian competitor, Plotinus’ trinity preserved gender balance.

In the fourth-century institutional Christianity rejected Plotinus’ hierarchical trinity in favor of one of coequal *hypostases*, or “persons.”<sup>17</sup> It also rejected notions of Neoplatonic emanation. Instead, it declared that the Son was “begotten” by God the Father, and the Spirit emerged from the Father—or jointly from the Father and

Son—by “spiration,” a term that captured a sense of the “Holy Breath.”<sup>18</sup>

Questions were raised in the high Middle Ages as to whether the three persons of the trinity might be expressions of a transcendent Godhead, comparable with the Hindu Brahman or the *Ain Soph* of the Kabbalah. Peter Lombard (c.1100–1160), bishop of Paris, argued that the divine essence constituted a Godhead that transcends the persons; but he was criticized by Joachim of Fiore, and condemned posthumously by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), on the grounds that his Godhead turned the trinity into a quarternity.<sup>19</sup> Mystical theologian Meister Eckhart (c.1260–c.1328) also explored notions of a Godhead, to be condemned in his turn. Lack of a well-defined Godhead leaves a weakness in Christian trinitarian doctrine. The customary attempt to make the Father serve that role fails on two counts. It exacerbates the problem of gender bias by implying that Divinity, at its highest level, is masculine. And the anthropomorphism of the Father undermines the principle that the Godhead should be without attributes.

Despite its weaknesses, the trinitarian doctrine that emerged from this long course of development has stood the test of time. It has not been challenged by any of the major segments of Christianity, except by Unitarians and Mormons.

Mainstream Christianity’s rejection of emanation extended to the way the universe came into being. It insisted that the universe was created *ex nihilo*, “from nothing.” The result was to separate creation from its creator, and then it was only a small step to imply—as many Gnostics had taught—that the universe was corrupt and evil. Yet belief in emanation continued, on a small scale, in the Eastern Orthodox Churches and very occasionally, in the work of Eckhart and others, in the West.

As trinitarian doctrine gained strength in Christianity, mainstream Judaism retreated into a strict monotheism; any attention paid to intermediate divine manifestations in biblical and early rabbinic times ceased.<sup>20</sup> But under Gnostic and Neoplatonic influence, the Kabbalists explored the concepts of multiple divine mani-

festations and emanation. The divine essence was said to cascade in a series of ten steps, or *sephiroth* (singular: *sephirah*, “number”), from the Godhead, or *Ain Soph*, to *Malkuth*,” the world of human affairs. The sephiroth are depicted graphically on a glyph known as the Tree of Life, arranged on three pillars: Severity (interestingly considered feminine), Mercy (masculine), and Equilibrium. The sephiroth can be interpreted with respect to the macrocosm or the microcosm. From the macrocosmic perspective, the sephiroth are archetypal forces, divine manifestations, even *logoi*.

The first three sephiroth: *Kether*, *Chokmah* and *Binah* form a trinity.<sup>21</sup> Kether is the presexual first manifestation of deity, comparable with Plotinus’ Monas or the Hindu Ishvara. Chokmah and Binah are a complementary pair of opposites: Chokmah—transformed from its feminine origins—is the primeval masculine force, and Binah the primeval feminine form. Four of the remaining seven sephiroth comprise further pairs of opposites, while the other three balance and integrate the polarities. Malkuth lies on the middle Pillar of Equilibrium, at the base of the Tree of Life.<sup>22</sup>

Kabbalistic theology distanced itself from Gnosticism in the important respect that Malkuth, the world we live in, was considered divine. There was no suggestion that we and our world are fundamentally separate from God. In the Kabbalah, the concepts of successive emanation of divine beings, emergence of complementary pairs of beings, and the innate divinity of creation are worked out in a most satisfying way.

Lutheran mystic and Hermeticist Jakob Böhme (1575–1624) drew upon Kabbalistic teachings to argue that the divine essence emanated from the Godhead first as three and then as seven. His sevenfold emanation included the Father, the expression of divine will; the Logos, or Christ; and Sophia, the feminine principle through which the universe came into being.<sup>23</sup>

The notion of a septenary emanation had no counterpart in mainstream Christian doctrine, but hints may be found in *Revelation*, which referred to “seven Spirits which are before [God’s] throne,” “seven lamps of fire burning

before the throne,” and “the seven stars.”<sup>24</sup> In another passage, God held a book with seven seals.<sup>25</sup> Septenary emanation finally gained attention in the twentieth century; the seven rays are discussed in detail in the books of Alice Bailey (1880–1949).

## The Human Constitution

A second pervasive theme was belief in a multi-level human constitution. A strong subtheme was recognition of a triune structure, either involving the physical body or within levels that transcend the body. In some cases the tiered structure intentionally mirrored the structure recognized in, or projected onto, Deity.

People in antiquity viewed the seen and unseen worlds as closely intertwined and assumed that man—along with other living beings and even “inanimate” objects—had subtle aspects extending beyond the physical. The Egyptians spoke of several such aspects, including the *ka* and the *ba*.<sup>26</sup> The *ka* captured the notion of the breath, or life-force, that distinguished the living from the dead—equivalent to the etheric body in modern esoteric teachings. The *ba* survived death and was often depicted in tomb iconography as a bird flying up from the corpse. Also mentioned were the *sah* (or *sahu*), the “spiritual body,” and the *ren*, one’s name.<sup>27</sup>

Biblical Judaism affirmed the belief in the *nephesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah*. “Nephesh” appears 744 times in the Hebrew Bible. For the most part, it corresponded closely to the Egyptian *ka*. In the later books, though, it began to acquire the meaning of “soul,” as in “Praise the Lord, O my soul [nephesh].”<sup>28</sup> The *ruach* and *neshamah* appear less often but also captured the notion of life or breath. *Ruach* could also mean “spirit,” as in “[T]he spirit [ruach] of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit [ruach] from the Lord troubled him.”<sup>29</sup> *Neshamah* could refer to something more powerful, as in “By the blast [neshamah] of God they perish, and by the breath [ruach] of his nostrils are they consumed.”<sup>30</sup> Under Hellenic influence the *nephesh*, *ruach* and *neshamah* began to be arranged into a triune, hierarchical structure of the human soul.

The Greeks spoke of the *psyche*, *nous* and *pneuma* as aspects of the human constitution that transcended the *soma*, or physical body. The precise meanings of those terms and the relationships among them varied, often in subtle ways, from one philosopher or school of philosophy to another. In Homer's epics *psyche* could refer to a "departed spirit" or "ghost,"<sup>31</sup> while more often it meant the breath or source of life, like the *ka* and *nephesh*.

The *nous* was the rational mind, or intellect. Reflecting the high regard in which Greeks held the intellect, Plato placed the *nous* in the divine world of Forms. In classical Greece, little distinction was made between the *nous* and the *pneuma* ("spirit"). But the Stoics of the third century BCE raised *pneuma* to a more exalted level, to mean a fragment of the spirit of Zeus, the cosmic *Pneuma*. It was the divine spark that affirmed man's divine origins and destiny.

Gnosticism was never a homogeneous movement or body of teachings. But much of it was influenced by Stoic teaching, and a vocal segment embraced an extreme dualism, in which the physical world was considered intrinsically evil.<sup>32</sup> Valentinus (c.100–c.160 CE) regarded the *pneuma* as the divine spark in man. But he narrowed the difference between the *nous* and the *psyche* and introduced the *chous*, a demonic aspect that animated the physical body.<sup>33</sup> For Valentinus and his school, the *pneuma* was the true human entity, imprisoned in an evil physical body. The only hope lay in escape from the physical world by acquiring *gnosis*: literally "knowledge," but perhaps also capturing the sense of enlightenment.

The Neoplatonists placed the *pneuma*, *nous* and *psyche* in a hierarchy that mirrored the divine trinity of Monas, *Nous* and *Psyche*. As the Stoics had done, they identified the *pneuma* as the divine spark, and the *nous* as the rational mind. The *psyche* animated the physical body, but it was not regarded as evil, like the Gnostic *chous*.

Early Christianity initially embraced a triune human constitution consisting of the *pneuma*, *psyche* and *soma*. The Apostle Paul prayed that "your whole spirit [*pneuma*] and soul [*psyche*] and body [*soma*] be preserved blameless unto

the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>34</sup> In the *Magnificat*, Mary likewise referred to both the *psyche* and the *pneuma*: "My soul [*psyche*] doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit [*pneuma*] hath rejoiced in God my Savior."<sup>35</sup>

Over the centuries, however, mainstream Christianity moved away from Platonic and Neoplatonic psychology to assert that only Jesus Christ had a divine *pneuma*. For the rest of humankind, the *nous* was absorbed into the *psyche*. The Fourth Council of Constantinople (869) decreed that man "has one rational and intellectual soul" whose primary role was to "animate the flesh."<sup>36</sup> The implications were far-reaching. Man may have been created in the image and likeness of God, but that likeness stopped short of a triune constitution and a share in the divine essence. Humankind was also denied a divine origin and destiny.

The notion of a binary human constitution—body and soul—gained further support as Aristotelian philosophy was rediscovered and replaced Platonism as the basis of Christian doctrine. At the apex of the Aristotelian revival, Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) went so far as to teach that the soul is "connaturally related to the body" and incapable of permanent existence apart from it.<sup>37</sup> The soul is only to be restored to its full stature with the resurrection of the body on the Last Day.

Only the Church of Rome regards the Fourth Council of Constantinople as authentic<sup>38</sup> and Aquinas' teachings as definitive. But the gloomy doctrines of a binary human constitution and body–soul codependency influenced almost the whole of Western Christianity. Not even Martin Luther, who otherwise despised Aristotelian philosophy, challenged them.

Belief in a divine spark continued, despite ecclesiastical disapproval, among certain mystics and mystical theologians. Meister Eckhart spoke of the *Seelenfünklein*, literally "spark of the soul" but often rendered in English translations as "citadel of the soul" or "light of the soul."<sup>39</sup> In his words: "There is something in the soul which is only God . . . For herein the soul takes its whole life and being and from this source it draws its life and being."<sup>40</sup> His views on the divine spark were condemned by Rome,

but others agreed with him. Sixteenth-century mystic Theresa of Ávila discussed “the spirit in the soul,”<sup>41</sup> and eighteenth-century Anglican clergyman William Law wrote of the hidden “pearl of eternity” in the center of the soul.<sup>42</sup> Belief in a divine spark also remained strong in the Eastern Orthodox Churches.

Just as belief in a triune human constitution of body, soul and spirit was preserved in certain segments of Christianity, belief in a triune soul consisting of the nephesh, ruach and neshamah survived in segments of Judaism. For example, the medieval Kabbalistic text, the *Zohar*, asserts: “There are three levels [of the soul] that are attached to each other, and they are Nephesh, Ruach, and Neshamah.”<sup>43</sup> Belief in the triune soul passed to the Safed school of Kabbalah<sup>44</sup> and then into Hassidic Judaism. One Hassidic writer shared these insights:

Man is possessed of a ghost [nephesh], a spirit [ruach], and a soul [neshamah] in this order of importance. At the Sabbath meal, the eating is the ghost, the singing of hymns is the spirit, and the discussion of Torah is the soul. Abraham is the ghost of Israel; Moses, his spirit; and the Messiah, his soul.<sup>45</sup>

The same triune soul was discussed by Christian occultist Éliphas Lévi (1810–1875), who declared that “the body is the veil of Nephesh, Nephesh is the veil of Ruach, Ruach is the veil or the shroud of Neshamah.”<sup>46</sup> Lévi identified the nephesh with the vitality of the physical body, ruach with the personality, and neshamah with mind or spirit. His student, Papus, described the nephesh as “the principle of life or form of concrete existence.”<sup>47</sup> Papus’ nephesh energizes the physical body and is sensitive, in a passive way, to the exterior world; at the same time, it interacts with ruach that lies above it. Ruach “consists of an interior, ideal being in which all that the concrete corporeal life manifests externally is to be found in a state of virtuality.”<sup>48</sup> Here we find echoes of the Platonic archetype. Whereas the nephesh is essentially undifferentiated, ruach gives the individual distinguishable characteristics and a sense of selfhood; it is the seat of will.

## Communities and Group Consciousness

From ancient times people have formed communities, societies, fraternities, orders, and similar organizations to protect esoteric teachings or engage in esoteric practices. Occult fraternities form an important class of such groups, and the Knights of the Round Table, Knights Templar, Rosicrucian and Masonic orders, and several modern orders were among those discussed in “Occult Orders in Western Esotericism.”

Monastic communities form another important class. “Monasticism” is derived from the Greek *monos*, meaning “alone.” The Therapeutae of Egypt and the Essenes of Palestine sought isolation from the larger societies of their times. Christian monasticism dates from the third and fourth centuries CE, when men and women took to the desert to live as hermits and to escape what they considered the increasing materialism and religious laxity of the Roman Empire.<sup>49</sup> As the number of hermits grew, some came together in informal communities, which offered isolation and opportunities for the ascetic life, but which also afforded collective security, pooling of resources, even a measure of companionship.

The monastic orders of the Middle Ages sprang from those early beginnings. They became important elements of institutional Christianity, and their power and influence grew to rival that of the bishops. Early Celtic monasteries admitted both men and women, and in some cases whole families; but separation of genders and celibacy soon became the norm.

Monastic orders provided an ideal setting for the contemplative life. They encouraged individual and communal prayer: the former in a monk’s or nun’s own cell, the latter in the monastery chapel. Communal prayer traditionally took the form of daily participation in the Mass and the divine office, or “canonical hours.” Based on Jewish precedents, the daily offices consisted of psalms and other prayers, recited, or more often chanted, at prescribed times during the day and night. Originally, they were

seven in number, corresponding to the psalmist's words: "Seven times a day do I praise thee,"<sup>50</sup> but by the Middle Ages the offices had expanded to eight, one every three hours: Matins (beginning at midnight), Lauds, Prime, Terce, Sext, None, Vespers, and Compline (at about 9:00 pm.).

Monks and nuns live according to *rules* governing behavior and affirming shared spiritual goals. Most famous was the Rule of St Benedict, written in about 529, which governed the Benedictine Order itself and indirectly influenced the whole of western monasticism. Its central tenet was *Ora et Labora* ("Pray and Work"). From time to time, the Benedictine Order was accused of laxity, and new orders emerged insisting on stricter asceticism. The Carthusians were founded in 1084, and the Cistercians in 1098. In turn, a still more ascetic branch of the Cistercian Order was founded in 1664: the Order of Cistercians of the Strict Observance, popularly known as Trappists. Along with the original Benedictine Order, all three orders continue to flourish today.

The High Middle Ages saw the emergence of religious orders that chose direct involvement in the world. Orders of friars were formed in which men took vows but traveled from place to place to care for the poor and sick or to teach. The Dominicans, or Order of Friars Preachers, and the Franciscans are the best known. Both included ordained priests and also "lay brothers." Initially, at least, members of both orders depended on begging to support themselves, whereupon they were called "mendicants," from the Latin *mendicans* ("begging"). Soon, however, friars established "houses" to serve as their base of operations, recovering a measure of the communal life they had initially rejected but not embracing the strict regimen of the divine office.

Christianity is often criticized for its sexism. Nobody can deny that many churchmen were misogynistic, and women were denied ordination to the priesthood. Yet the abbesses of important Celtic monasteries exerted both spiritual and political power in the regions where they were located. In the Church of Rome, their power was more restricted, but some, like Hildegard of Bingen and Catherine of Siena, still

felt comfortable advising and even reproaching popes. The medieval church was one of the few institutions of its time to offer women formal opportunities to pursue the spiritual life. The religious orders were most important in that regard, but the Beguines and similar groups offered further opportunities on the fringe of the institutional church. Women were considered unsuitable for the mendicant life, but branches of the Franciscan and Dominican Orders were established in which women lived in communities and cared for the poor and sick within the safety of cities.<sup>51</sup>

The Reformation brought about dissolution of the monasteries in several countries, but different kinds of communities emerged among the Anabaptists, Hutterites and Mennonites. In the seventeenth-century Quaker communities were established in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island, practicing simplicity of lifestyles and regular "meetings" at which worship consisted of silent prayer. Quaker prayer shared important characteristics with monastic contemplative prayer.

The Counter-Reformation saw the formation of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) dedicated to missionary and teaching activities. For both friars and the Jesuits, "community" came to be understood in a subjective rather than literal sense; instead of communal living, it implied strong loyalty to, and identification with, the group. Until very recently, all members of religious orders wore distinctive clothing to emphasize group identity—and perhaps to distance themselves from the general public.

Sodalities and similar societies offered some of the characteristics of religious orders to laypeople who married, had families, and engaged in the whole spectrum of occupations. They too would define "community" in the subjective sense. At the time of the crusades, sodalities were organized for the purposes of collective penitence. More recently they have taken on a devotional orientation, usually with a specific focus like the Blessed Sacrament or Mary.

In modern times communes and intentional communities of various kinds have explored opportunities for collective living. No longer restricted to single-gender populations or imposing celibacy, these communities welcome

families. Nor do they generally have prayer routines, like the canonical hours. Yet some intentional communities have a specific focus, like ecological sustainability or “living off the grid.” Certain nonprofit welfare organizations have qualities that might warrant their inclusion in this discussion. An example would be Doctors Without Borders, whose members make enormous sacrifice and exhibit a strong and cohesive focus on human suffering and the betterment of humankind. Whether they qualify as “esoteric,” or whether they have a spiritual dimension, may depend on how those terms are defined.

Formal communities provide environments for experimentation in group consciousness. We may define group consciousness as a state of being in which separative barriers are broken down; individual interest is freely subordinated to service; and compassion extends beyond the immediate family, nationality, or ethnic group—ultimately to the whole of humanity. In the communities we have examined, the experiments often fell short of that standard. Indeed, many achieved little more than what might be called “collective consciousness,” in which sharing took place within the community but did not extend beyond its walls. Group consciousness has been slow to develop, and few of us could claim to be fully “group conscious.”

Yet the seeds of group consciousness were sown in antiquity. In biblical times, Judaism emphasized the importance of the family and the community. “The community” did not extend to other religions or ethnic groups, yet the Jews set a new standard for the ancient world. Christ demonstrated compassion for human suffering in his healing ministry and shocked the culture of his time by advocating love of enemies.<sup>52</sup> Segments of early Christianity reportedly practiced the sharing of resources: “[A]ll that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.”<sup>53</sup> At about the same time the Stoics were preaching concepts of universal brotherhood. Epictetus (c.55–135) wrote: “Do you not know, that as a foot is no longer a foot if it is detached from the body, so you are no

longer a man if you are separated from other men.”<sup>54</sup>

In formal communities of all kinds, individual identity is submerged, to a degree, in that of the group, and a measure of personal freedom is sacrificed to common interests. Members may also share resources. In certain types of communities, the sacrifice of freedom is almost total, and members retain no personal possessions.

During the period herein under consideration, service received the most attention from groups within institutional religion. Fourth-century church father Basil of Caesarea encouraged religious orders to feed the hungry, nurse the sick, and comfort the afflicted. Benedictine monks were among the few providers of hospitality and social welfare services in the Middle Ages. Francis of Assisi (c.1182–1226) and his friars embraced abject poverty and cared for the poor and sick. His close contemporary, the Slavic king Vladimir Monomakh, urged his people: “forget not the poor, and support them to the extent of your means. Give to the orphan, protect the widow.”<sup>55</sup>

Contemplative monastic orders have been criticized for withdrawing from the world. Critics complain that they emphasize individual spiritual development at the expense of service. But such criticism may rest on an overly narrow definition of service. Service may be focused on levels other than the physical. Contemplative monks and nuns may serve as beacons of light in a dark world, and their global spiritual influence may be profound.

Dissolution of the monasteries in much of Europe, during the Reformation, led to an abrupt decline in welfare services—and perhaps also in the more subjective types of service. The Anabaptists and other early Protestant communities shared resources primarily among their own members. Yet the Rosicrucian Manifestoes, written in Protestant Europe, stressed the importance of service, notably healing. The Shakers offered the first Christian healing ministry in the West since the eighth century. Evangelical Christians led the campaign to abolish slavery. John Wesley and his followers

visited prison inmates. Eventually lay orders like the Salvation Army and the Roman Catholic Society of St. Vincent de Paul made a strong commitment to serve the downtrodden segments of society.

Sadly, most occult fraternities, during the period considered, encouraged collective consciousness among their own members but remained insular, with little regard for outreach or service. This has begun to change, and some Masonic organizations, like the Shriners, undertake commendable works of service.<sup>56</sup>

## Ritual

Ritual is the oldest known religious practice, dating back to prehistory and possibly even predating language. It appeals to the physical, emotional and mental faculties through a combination of words, gestures, movements, sounds, and settings of symbolic value. Repetition establishes rhythm and creates a sense of order and tradition, much as day and night, summer and winter do in nature.

Ritual is described in the sacred scriptures of all cultures. But it seems particularly suited to the psychology of the West and to the fifth subrace, which gained its first significant foothold in Europe:

[F]orce cannot be concentrated in the West as easily as it can in the East, nor are the bodies of Western men fitted for what I would call a constant in-and-out going of the physical body . . . . For that reason rituals have been made to concentrate power in certain tracks and bring it down in that way.<sup>57</sup>

Ritual can be discussed from an exoteric, occult or mystical perspective. All rituals have an outer form, and some are occasions for elaborate ceremony or pageantry. When performed carelessly, with embarrassment, or without understanding of its inherent symbolism, that outer form may be all there is, prompting charges of “empty ritual” sometimes leveled against religious ceremony. When performed with care, dedication and understanding, the experience can be powerful, profound and transformative for all involved.

Occult or magical ritual is intended to invoke nonphysical energy and direct it to desired

ends. When developed with due understanding and performed by a trained practitioner or *magus*, it has the potential for great power. In the earlier article, “Occult Orders,” ritual was identified as one of the pervasive patterns within occult fraternities. Most significant was theurgy (“divine work”), a product of medieval Hermeticism that formed the basis for the rituals in most later orders, including the Masonic orders and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Theurgic ritual typically included incantations to attract the favorable influences of celestial entities, or to ameliorate their unfavorable influences. Reflecting Kabbalistic influence, many incantations incorporated Hebrew words, symbols, and names of God.<sup>58</sup>

Occult ritual obviously raises moral concerns relating to the source of the power invoked and the ends to which it is directed. Western occultism was mixed in its intentions. Sometimes the objective was to gratify ego, secure affection, boost careers, or harm enemies. But so far as we can judge, such abuse was not the norm. The most common objective of theurgy was the magus’ own spiritual development. Rabbi and theurgist Abraham of Worms (c.1362–c.1460) obtained a ritual from an Egyptian magus named Abramelin for contacting one’s Holy Guardian Angel.<sup>59</sup> Occult ritual occasionally was used for healing purposes.

The Christian theurgist Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486–1535) authored numerous works on Hermeticism, the best-known being his *Three Books on Occult Philosophy* (c.1510). He saw theurgy as a road to self-perfection:

Magic is a faculty of wonderful virtue, full of most high mysteries, containing the most profound contemplation of most secret things. [It] is the most perfect, and chief science, that sacred, and sublimer kind of philosophy . . . the most absolute perfection of all most excellent philosophy.<sup>60</sup>

Agrippa described a variety of rituals, each with appropriate words of power and planetary correspondences. For example, invoking the Sun—or perhaps the Life that ensouls it—brought “nobility of mind, perspicuity of imagination, the nature of knowledge and opinion, maturity, counsel, zeal, light of justice, reason and judg-

ment distinguishing right from wrong, purging light from the darkness of ignorance, the glory of truth found out and charity the queen of all virtues.”<sup>61</sup> Invocation could include musical tones and intervals. Agrippa related the Sun to the octave or double octave. By contrast, Mercury corresponded to the perfect fourth and Jupiter to the fifth.<sup>62</sup>

Most practitioners of theurgic ritual considered the setting, paraphernalia, symbols, and words and gestures of power to be critically important. Elaborate magical paraphernalia were constructed, and long incantations and minutely choreographed gestures were learned by rote. Even the slightest misstep was believed to invite failure—or worse. But Abraham of Worms dismissed such concerns, insisting that the practitioner’s inner purity was of greater importance. In his view, the effective and safe invocation of higher beings required a long period of inner purification and transformation. The aspiring magus must embrace a life of asceticism, fasting and prayer, akin to the spiritual practices of the mystics.<sup>63</sup>

Ritual has always played a prominent role in religious worship. Many references to Jewish rituals appear in the Hebrew Bible. Ritual circumcision, or *Brit Milah*, was established as a sign of the covenant between the Jewish people and God.<sup>64</sup> The *Seder*, or Passover feast, commemorated the night when the avenging angel passed over the Israelites’ homes prior to the Exodus. God later instructed Moses to “make me a sanctuary; that I may dwell among them.”<sup>65</sup> Every Sabbath Day the priests placed newly baked, *lechem haPani*, “Bread of the Presence,” or “showbread,” on a golden table in the sanctuary.<sup>66</sup> They also provided “flags

and bowls with which to pour drink offerings,” presumably wine.<sup>67</sup>

The book of *Exodus* prescribed the priestly vestments to be made for Aaron, the first high priest. “For glory and for beauty,” they included “a breastplate, and an *ephod* [tunic], and a robe, and a brodered coat, a mitre, and a girdle.” To make the vestments, the priests “shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen.”<sup>68</sup> Temple furnishings included: “the pure candlestick,” “the altar of incense,” “the altar of burnt offering,” “the cloths of service,” and “anointing oil, and sweet incense.”<sup>69</sup> Temple priests followed those same rubrics century after century.

Animal sacrifices were offered in response to God’s command: “If any man of you bring an offering unto the Lord, ye shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd, and of the flock.”<sup>70</sup> Detailed instructions followed for the se-

lection, slaughter and burning of the sacrificial animal. From our perspective animal sacrifice was barbaric, but we should remember that it took the place of human sacrifice in earlier cultures. We recall that Abraham, father of the Jewish race, was prepared to sacrifice Isaac, but God provided a ram to take his son’s place.<sup>71</sup>

Offering of the shewbread fell into disuse, and animal sacrifice ended when the Jerusalem temple was destroyed in 70 CE. But many other Jewish rituals survive to the present, including circumcision, the Bar/Bat Mitzvah, the Seder, and observation of the *Yamim Noraim*, or High Holy Days. Synagogue worship, every Saturday, includes ceremonial reading of the Torah.

Over a period of centuries, Christianity developed a rich array of sacred rituals. The central

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act of collective worship, or *liturgy* (from the Greek *leitourgeia*, “public work”), was the Mass, which commemorated the Last Supper and Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.<sup>72</sup> As celebration of the Mass became more elaborate, Christians drew upon Judaic temple precedents by adopting the use of vestments, candles and incense. By medieval times the High Mass, involving multiple clergy and acolytes, rivaled great occasions of state in its pageantry. The Eucharist itself, which will be discussed in more detail later, recalled the ritual offering of the shewbread. Other rituals included the use of anointing oil.

Until the late Middle Ages, the number of Christian sacraments in common use varied from one ecclesiastical jurisdiction to another. Some recognized only baptism, the Eucharist, and holy orders (ordination of clergy), while others recognized as many as ten. The canon of seven sacraments: baptism, confirmation, the Eucharist, penance, extreme unction (last rites), holy orders, and matrimony, was decreed by the Council of Florence (1439). All seven were declared to have been instituted by Christ, though not all can be traced back to scripture or apostolic usage. Other rites, like burial, exorcism, and profession of monastic vows, were demoted to the lower status of “sacramentals.”

The Protestant reformers complained of abuses and excesses within the Roman church and stripped most of the ritual from their worship services. They accepted only baptism and the “Lord’s Supper” as authentic sacraments. Whether their actions were justified or not, the end result was that Protestant worship became barren and lacking in vitality—offset only by fiery preaching. The sacraments were administered without interruption in the Church of Rome and the Eastern Orthodox churches. And they have been revitalized by the Anglican and Lutheran churches, spurred by “high-church” factions that claim continuity with the traditions of pre-Reformation Christianity.

Music has long played an important role in ritual. The author of *Ephesians* urged: “[B]e filled with the Spirit; Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord.”<sup>73</sup> Ambrosian and Gregorian chants in the

western church and Byzantine chant in the East all were derived from Jewish temple chants. In the late Middle Ages, monophonic or polyphonic singing, with or without instrumental accompaniment, became a staple of Christian worship in the West. As polyphony increased in complexity, settings of the Mass became the great challenge for composers of the Renaissance, Baroque and Classical periods. Well-known composers, including Mozart and Haydn, also wrote music for use in Masonic rituals.<sup>74</sup>

How much overlap exists between the Christian sacraments and ceremonial magic has long been debated. Cornelius Agrippa saw little difference between them. Both, he declared, should begin with an attitude of adoration and humble supplication: “[I]n the first place implore God the Father . . . that thou also mayest be one worthy of his favor.” After warning worshippers to avoid “menstruous women” and “her who hath the hemorrhoids,” Agrippa instructed his readers: “Thou shalt wash and anoint, and perfume thyself, and shalt offer sacrifices.”<sup>75</sup>

Yet institutional Christianity became increasingly hostile to any suggestion that its sacraments could be classified as occult practices. Perhaps leading churchmen did not understand the profound spirituality of some types of ceremonial magic. But much of the hostility probably stemmed from the abuse of magic by unscrupulous practitioners. French occultist Éliphas Lévi (1810–1875) famously declared: “sorcerers outraged the children of the Magi.”<sup>76</sup> But he warned that in failing to recognize the magical nature of the sacraments, the churches cut themselves off from a rich tradition. “Religion,” he urged, “can no longer reject a doctrine anterior to the Bible and in perfect accord with traditional respect for the past, as well as with our most vital hopes for progress in the future . . . The crook of the priesthood shall become the rod of miracles.”<sup>77</sup>

Dion Fortune (1890–1946), an initiate in a Golden Dawn derivative, declared that “the Mass of the Church and the ceremonies of the Freemasons are . . . representative types of magic, whatever their exponents may like to say to the contrary. The Mass is a perfect example of a ritual of evocation.”<sup>78</sup> Yet she judged that the Christian sacraments had de-

generated into “vain observances in the hands of those who regard them with superstitious awe rather than an understanding of their psychological and esoteric significance.”<sup>79</sup>

In addition to its occult significance, religious ritual also has a mystical dimension, stimulating reflection on higher realities and nurturing higher levels of consciousness. Most of the great mystics lived disciplined lives, built around a strict rhythm of activity. The most highly-developed rhythm was monks’ recitation of the divine office. But the annual liturgical cycle, with its prescribed scriptural readings, changing colors of vestments and draperies, and days of penitence and rejoicing, is an important pattern too, instructing and inspiring the faithful.

Rhythm can create a sense of timelessness. A ritual with a definite periodicity—daily, weekly, monthly or annually, as the case may be—can be likened to the rhythmic tolling of a bell. Each enactment is a recapitulation, recreating an eternal moment in time and giving the expression “reliving an experience” precise validity.<sup>80</sup> Even rituals enacted at irregular intervals, like a coronation or funeral of a monarch, build upon what has gone before.

Ritual is the most pervasive of the themes discussed in this article. Modern esoteric teachings have provided important new insights. Theosophist Charles Leadbeater (1854–1934) commented that devic entities are attracted in Masonic rituals as well as during the Mass. Yet the level of consciousness is different. “In Christianity,” he declared, “we invoke great Angels who are far above us in spiritual unfoldment.” “In Freemasonry . . . we invoke angelic aid, but those upon whom we call are nearer to our own level in development and intelligence.”<sup>81</sup>

Alice Bailey declared that the Mysteries “will be restored to outer expression through the medium of the Church and the Masonic Fraternity, if those groups leave off being organizations with material purpose, and become organisms with living objectives.”<sup>82</sup> Ritual will rise to its greatest height in the mysteries of the future.

## The Initiatory Path

Initiation was a key element in the ancient Mysteries. We know that initiation required long preparation and successful completion of tests designed to determine a candidate’s dedication, suitability and trustworthiness. But we have little information about the initiatory degrees they offered. The earliest reliable information comes from the Mithraic order of Roman times, which offered seven degrees: *Corax* (Raven, or sometimes “Messenger”), *Nymphus* (Bridegroom), *Miles* (Soldier), *Leo* (Lion), *Perses* (Persian), *Heliodromus* (Sun-runner), and *Pater* (Father).<sup>83</sup> As noted in “Occult Orders,” the higher degrees were reserved for the priesthood, and *Pater* seems to have been reserved for the spiritual leaders of important *mithraea*, or temples.

Early Christianity might have developed into a mystery religion, in which a small elite would progress through initiatory grades, seeking enlightenment as they went. Perhaps Christ intended it to be both a mystery religion and a religion of the masses, but leaders of the proto-institutional church restricted it to the latter. Bishops would “shepherd” the faithful and determine what beliefs and practices were permissible. Where the mysteries did survive was in the sacraments. Two “initiatory” sacraments were recognized in the early church: baptism and holy orders.

Baptism admitted a candidate to the Christian community upon affirmation of belief in Jesus Christ and renunciation of evil. When infant baptism became the norm, and sponsors made the affirmation on the child’s behalf, the separate sacrament of confirmation developed. Upon reaching the age of consent the candidate him- or herself now reaffirmed belief in the basic tenets of faith. Confirmation played a role similar to that of the Jewish Bar Mitzvah: recognizing the privileges and the responsibilities of approaching adulthood.

Holy orders were divided into minor and major orders, reminiscent of the lesser and greater mysteries of antiquity. The major orders were

deacon, priest and bishop, while minor orders included acolyte and reader. Also qualifying as an initiatory ritual, but not considered part of the sacramental canon, was admission to religious orders. Both men and women could take vows to affirm their commitment to the ideals and rule of the particular religious order. The Rule of Saint Benedict required the vows of stability, *conversatio morum*, and obedience.<sup>84</sup> “Stability” meant remaining in the same monastery. *Conversatio morum* referred to conforming to the community’s “manner of life.” Obedience was to the superior, Christ’s representative in the community. Other common religious vows were poverty, chastity and obedience, while contemplative monks and nuns might take the additional vow of silence.

The mystical path is less structured, but mystics often spoke of definite milestones on their journey toward union with the Divine. In the Merkabah mysticism of Judaism,<sup>85</sup> the seeker had to pass through seven *hekhaloth* (“palaces”) en route to the throne-world.<sup>86</sup> Passage from one *hekhalah* to the next became progressively more difficult. Powerful angels, or *archons*, guarded the gates and did all in their power to impede the individual’s progress. Safe passage demanded not only the possession of secret passwords or seals but also great knowledge of the Torah, purity of heart, rigorous preparation through ascetic disciplines, and exceptional courage. Failure could result in destruction by the archons. When Christian desert father Antony of Egypt asked who could pass through all the devil’s traps set on earth, reportedly he heard a voice say “humility.”

Gregory of Nyssa (c.335– c.395) compared the mystical path to the biblical story of the Exodus. Milestones corresponded to Moses’ encounter with the burning bush, ascent into the dark cloud on Mount Sinai, and return with the tablets of the Law. The journey is ongoing, and the mystical and the moral must always go together.<sup>87</sup>

A century later, the Syrian Neoplatonist known as the Pseudo-Dionysius divided the mystical journey into the three stages of purgation, illumination and unity. The purgative stage—illustrated well by the desert ascetics of earlier times—consisted of renunciation of the things

of this world. It was intended to instill a sense of detachment, rid the self of passions, and focus attention on God. The illuminative stage, which allowed the light of God to shine into the soul, encouraged the increase of virtue, particularly love. Intensely rewarding, this stage could involve ecstatic experiences. In the third stage of the journey, the individual achieved loving union with God.<sup>88</sup>

Theresa of Ávila had a vision of the soul as like “a diamond of very clear crystal in which there were many rooms.”<sup>89</sup> The vision inspired her to conceive of the mystical path as progress through seven mansions, the innermost being the sanctuary of God. Theresa’s mansions seem to echo the palaces of Merkabah mysticism, and it is significant that she was of mixed Christian and Jewish ancestry. She recognized that to move from one mansion/palace to the next required progressively greater effort and brought increasing risk of failure. But in Theresa’s description, divine grace helped the seeker overcome demonic efforts to impede progress.

The ladder has always been a popular metaphor for spiritual ascent, recalling Jacob’s ladder described in *Genesis*. John Climacus (“John of the Ladder”), a seventh-century monk at the monastery on Mount Sinai, wrote the influential work *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*.<sup>90</sup> Seven hundred years later, English mystic Walter Hilton wrote *The Ladder of Perfection*.<sup>91</sup> John of the Cross spoke of a “mystic ladder of love” consisting of ten steps.<sup>92</sup>

John of the Cross is credited with coining the term “dark night of the soul.” The dark night is a long purgative stage—or series of stages—in which the seeker may experience “aridity” in prayer and a sense of abandonment by God. Through that experience the soul is purged of its weaknesses and prepared for the journey that lies ahead. John identified “two kinds of darkness and purgation corresponding to the two parts of man’s nature—the sensual and the spiritual.”<sup>93</sup> There is a “night of the sense” and a “night of the spirit.” John also referred to the “active night,” in which the seeker strives to overcome his or her own weaknesses, and the more painful “passive night,” in which God completes the process of purgation. The latter, despite its harshness, is a blessing in disguise;

the darkness humbles the soul and makes it miserable “only to give it light in everything.”<sup>94</sup> God demands total renunciation in preparation for the glory of the unitive state.

Twentieth-century Anglican scholar Evelyn Underhill sought to accommodate the work of John of the Cross by expanding Dionysius’ three stages of the mystical path to five. In her description, the soul awakens to new possibilities and then progresses through purgation, illumination, and the “dark night,” to the final stage of loving union with God.<sup>95</sup> Underhill’s five stages can be correlated with events in the life of Christ: awakening corresponds to Christ’s nativity; purgation to the baptism and temptation in the wilderness; illumination to the transfiguration; the “dark night” to the passion and crucifixion; and union to the resurrection and ascension.<sup>96</sup>

The initiatory grades of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn were identified with the sephiroth on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life—now interpreted from the perspective of man, the microcosm. Whereas the divine force descends from the Ain Soph, through Kether, to Malkuth, the initiatory path rises from Malkuth toward Kether. The seeker confronts many challenges on the path, including bringing the pairs of opposites into balance and resolving their forces in the sephiroth on the Middle Pillar. Emphasis on the pairs of opposites and their resolution provides valuable insight into the nature of the initiatory path.

Modern Rosicrucians tend to speak of self-initiation rather than the graded initiations of Freemasonry and the Golden Dawn. And while initiation is a frequent topic of discussion, no general agreement exists concerning grades or the levels of consciousness they demand or demonstrate.

Max Heindel (1865–1919), founder of the Rosicrucian Fellowship, spoke of three initiatory grades in western esotericism: “Clairvoyant,” “Initiate,” and “Adept.” “[T]he Clairvoyant,” he explained, “is one who sees the invisible world; the Initiate both sees the invisible world and understands what he sees, while the Adept sees, knows and has power over things and forces there.”<sup>97</sup> Heindel attributed his teachings to an

“Elder Brother”—presumably an Adept, but he never claimed to have attained any of the three initiatory levels.

Rudolf Steiner (1861–1925)—who would qualify as an “Initiate” in Heindel’s system—served briefly as head of the German Section of the Theosophical Society. But his roots were in the Rosicrucian tradition, and the Anthroposophical Society, which he founded, reflected Rosicrucian rather than Theosophical teachings. During his quarter-century of lecturing he offered several accounts of “Rosicrucian” and “Christian initiation.” In 1906–1907 he identified seven Rosicrucian initiatory grades: “Study,” “Acquisition of Imagination,” “Inspired Knowledge,” “Rhythmization of Life”—also known as “Discovery of the Philosopher’s Stone,” “Knowledge of Man as Microcosm,” “Knowledge of the Macrocosm,” and “Divine Bliss.”<sup>98</sup>

For years later, Steiner identified seven stages of “Christian Initiation”: The Washing of the Feet; The Scourging; The Crowning with Thorns; The Mystic Death; The Burial; the Resurrection; the Ascension.<sup>99</sup> Elsewhere he emphasized that Rosicrucian initiation “was an Initiation of the Spirit. It was never an Initiation of the Will . . . Hence the individual was led to those Initiations which were to take him beyond the stage of Imagination, Inspiration, and Intuition.”<sup>100</sup> Steiner contrasted the process of Rosicrucian initiation with the will-based *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius Loyola. He characterized the latter as an “incorrect method of Initiation.” Ironically, however, Steiner encouraged the same kind of deep meditation on Christ’s passion as did Ignatius; for example:

[W]e can go through the experience which leads to the Imagination of the Scourging when we place the following vividly before us: “Much suffering and pain will meet me in the world; yes, from all sides suffering and pain may come; no one escapes them. But I will so steel my will that suffering and pain, the scourgings that come from the world, may do their worst.” . . . When the person in question makes this a matter of his perception, and lives within it, he actually feels something like sharp pains and woundings, like strokes of a scourge against his

own skin, and the Imagination arises as if he were outside himself, and was watching himself scourged according to the example of Christ Jesus. In line with this example, one can experience the Crowning of Thorns, the Mystic Death, and so on.<sup>101</sup>

Other Rosicrucians have adapted the Mithraic grades to produce the degrees of Raven, Occultist (or Hidden Scholar), Warrior, Lion (or Suffering), Representative of the Group, Sun Hero, and Father.<sup>102</sup>

Dion Fortune's lineage ran through the Golden Dawn tradition, but she ignored its initiatory grades based on the Tree of Life. Instead, she identified the seven initiations of Brother, Neophyte, Dedicand, Server, Seeker, Adept and Master. The term Master, she declared, "is never applied to a being incarnated on the physical plane, but is reserved for those who no longer need to incarnate for the purpose of performance of their work."<sup>103</sup> Fortune characterized Adepts as "elder brothers," drawing upon the terminology of Rosicrucian teachings.

We have extended the discussion in this section into the twentieth century because the insights shared by Steiner, Heindel, Underhill, Fortune and others shed important light on earlier practices that were shrouded in secrecy. Except for Fortune's, their insights remained relatively free from cross-fertilization from eastern esoteric traditions.

What we see is that from ancient times people have divided the spiritual journey into phases. Separating the phases were either initiatory rituals, conducted by a religious or occult organization, or simply the seeker's self-recognition of major expansions of consciousness. The language used and the metaphors invoked to depict those milestone never showed signs of convergence. Yet Christianity's claim that its sacraments were instituted by Christ and the Rosicrucian's reference to the "Elder Brothers" demonstrate growing awareness of the role of the Planetary Hierarchy. The trans-Himalayan teachings of the twentieth century provide a much more detailed treatment of initiation and the relationship between initiates and the Hierarchy.

## Transformation

Transformation is a broad subject. It can refer to the ritual transformation of material substances, or it can refer to the transformation of individual or collective consciousness that occurs at stages on the spiritual path—or propels people forward on the path. However interpreted, it is a theme running through many segments of western esotericism.

### The Eucharist

Believers affirm that, during the most solemn part of the Mass, bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. For two millennia the Eucharist has been the central act of Christian worship, but its roots go back much farther in history. In many ancient cultures, participants consumed bread and wine in the belief that they were eating the god the elements represented and absorbing its divine qualities.<sup>104</sup>

In the Hebrew Bible Melchizedek, king of Salem and "priest of the most high God," "brought forth bread and wine" and blessed Abram.<sup>105</sup> God's command to Moses to offer "shewbread" and wine was mentioned earlier. In *Proverbs* Chokmah/Sophia invited the townspeople to a special feast; to "him that wanteth understanding" she said: "Come, eat of my bread, and drink of the wine which I have mingled."<sup>106</sup>

According to tradition, Christ instituted the Eucharist at the Last Supper:

Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many.<sup>107</sup>

After the resurrection Christ "took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to [his disciples]," adding that he would be known thereafter to his followers "in breaking of bread."<sup>108</sup> The evangelists recorded prophetic words spoken during Jesus' ministry. Allegedly, he had said: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger;"<sup>109</sup> he described himself

as “the true vine;”<sup>110</sup> and his first miracle was to change water into wine.<sup>111</sup> Most significantly, he declared: “[M]y flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.”<sup>112</sup>

Ritual Eucharistic meals began soon thereafter, and scripted liturgies were prepared to guide them. One is contained in the *Didache* (Greek: “teaching”), an anonymous document that some scholars place as early as 50 CE.<sup>113</sup> Anglican monk Gregory Dix (1901–1952) concluded from his studies that the primitive church did not have a single eucharistic rite, but the several rites in use shared a recognizable format, or “shape.” It consisted of the *offertory*, the “taking” of bread and wine: the *consecration*, the eucharistic dialogue (“The Lord be with you . . . .”) and institution narrative; the *fraction*, the breaking of the bread; and the *communion*, the receipt of the elements by the celebrant and congregation.<sup>114</sup> The fourfold shape was established before the gospels were written and before an intellectual understanding of the Eucharist emerged.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, the intellectual understanding probably emerged from the worship experience, rather than the reverse.

Notions of the “real presence” took root no later than the mid-second century. Writing in the 160s, Justin Martyr asserted the food which “is called among us *Eukaristia*,” is “not as common bread and common drink.” Just as Jesus Christ

having been made flesh by the Word of God, had both flesh and blood for our salvation, so likewise have we been taught that the food which is blessed by the prayer of His word, and from which our blood and flesh by transmutation are nourished, is the flesh and blood of that Jesus who was made flesh. For the apostles, in the memoirs composed by them, which are called Gospels, have thus delivered unto us what was enjoined upon them; that Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, said, “This do ye in remembrance of Me, this is My body;” and that, after the same manner, having taken the cup and given thanks He said, “This is My blood.”<sup>116</sup>

Early Christians believed that they received the body and blood of Christ, but a definite understanding of the transformation of the elements took centuries to evolve. Some commentators would argue that the process continues today, testifying to the profundity of the Eucharistic mystery.

The ninth-century French Benedictine theologian Radbertus Paschasius was the first to propose that the bread and wine are physically transformed into the body and blood of Christ, even though the bread and wine appeared to remain unchanged.<sup>117</sup> He was ahead of his time, since the Aristotelian revival, which offered the categories of *substance* and *accidents* to explain the proposition, still lay in the future. The Fourth Lateran Council finally defined the doctrine of transubstantiation in 1215, decreeing that the “bread [is] changed [Latin: *transsubstantiatio*] by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood.”<sup>118</sup>

Opposition to the doctrine of transubstantiation came from several quarters. The Eastern Orthodox churches insisted that the mystery of the Eucharist could not be reduced to a simplistic formula. And after the Reformation in the West, the Calvinists asserted that the Eucharist was purely commemorative in nature, and the elements remained ordinary bread and wine.

An intermediate view emerged, primarily among Lutherans and Anglicans, affirming a “sacramental union” with Christ.<sup>119</sup> The Eucharistic elements might remain unchanged, but communicants received Christ “in their souls”; in the process, communicants and the church experienced their own transformation. In recent times, an increasing number of Anglicans and Lutherans have embraced a stronger belief in the real presence, stopping short of transubstantiation but affirming that the body and blood of Christ are localized in some manner in the elements.<sup>120</sup>

Even within Roman Catholicism, where transubstantiation remains the official doctrine, notions of a more subjective transformation have been explored. Swiss theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–1988) declared that the mystery of the Eucharist transcends dogma:

It is evident that the “mystery” cannot be “explained,” neither the “transubstantiation” of bread and wine into Flesh and Blood nor the other far more important happening which can analogously be called “transubstantiation” of Christ’s Flesh and Blood into the organism of the Church (and of Christians as her members). What is important is not that we know *how* God does it, but that we know *that* and *why* he does it.<sup>121</sup>

Jesuit priest and paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) viewed celebration of the Eucharist as an activity of global or cosmic dimensions. When the priest utters the words of institution, he said, they “extend beyond the morsel of bread over which they are said: they give birth to the mystical body of Christ. The effect of the priestly act extends beyond the consecrated host to the cosmos itself.”<sup>122</sup>

### Alchemy

In its simplest exoteric terms, alchemy was concerned with the transmutation of lead into gold. And in many cases it was probably motivated by nothing more than greed. Yet the study of alchemy took place in an intellectual environment that drew no sharp divisions between the physical and the nonphysical, the seen and the unseen worlds, the inanimate and the animate. Transformation potentially extended beyond the physical to include the alchemist and others. Also, as we shall see, wealth was not the only driving force behind the work.

Interest in alchemy dates back to ancient Egypt. In 296 CE, the Roman Emperor Diocletian ordered that all Egyptian books on the subject be burned. The very word “alchemy” is Arabic in origin, confirming that it was known elsewhere in the Middle East. During the period of Muslim expansion alchemy made its way to Moorish Spain and eventually to the rest of Europe. In the thirteenth-century, it attracted the attention of many people, including leading churchmen. Notable among them were Albertus Magnus, bishop, saint, and “Doctor of the Church”; and his student Thomas Aquinas, theologian, saint, and “Angelic Doctor.” Aquinas allegedly wrote the alchemical text *Aurora Consurgens* shortly before his death.<sup>123</sup>

Alchemy regained favor in the seventeenth century, after a lull during the Renaissance, with the work of Austrian nobleman Paracelsus, mathematician John Dee, physician Robert Fludd, and many others. Two alchemical texts were published along with the Rosicrucian Manifestos of 1614–1616: *Consideration of the More Secret Philosophy* by Philip à Gabella, a paraphrase of a work by Dee; and the much longer allegory “The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreuz” by German Protestant theologian Johann Valentin Andreae.<sup>124</sup> By then alchemy’s objectives were becoming broader. The transmutation of metals was beginning to be viewed as a byproduct, or outward sign, of larger transformations at work.

An intermediate step in the alchemical process was the production of the “philosopher’s stone,” a substance that could transmute metals but also had curative and rejuvenative potential; perhaps it was the elixir of life. Paracelsus (1493–1541) explored alchemy’s applications to medicine.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, he viewed his alchemical studies and his religion as parts of a seamless continuum, affirming that “the foundation of these and other arts be laid in the holy Scriptures, upon the doctrine and faith of Christ.”<sup>126</sup> Paracelsus prayed thus:

Whosoever shall find out this secret, and attain to this gift of God, let him praise the most high God, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost; the Grace of God let him only implore that he may use the fame of his glory, and the profit of his neighbor. This the merciful God grant to be done, through Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord. Amen.<sup>127</sup>

Paracelsus insisted that alchemical transmutations, like theurgic magic, had to be initiated when the Sun, Moon and planets were in favorable configurations;<sup>128</sup> otherwise the process could be ineffective or dangerous.

Aspiring alchemists pored over a vast literature purporting to explain how to produce the philosopher’s stone. But they faced a number of challenges. The most authoritative texts were written by master alchemists who had actually accomplished the “Great Work”; but key steps were omitted — intended to be communicated

orally to trusted students. Many other texts were nothing more than plagiarized compilations of earlier material, offered by people with no relevant experience or understanding. Few alchemists succeeded. Many died from mercury poisoning or explosions in their laboratories.

Another major challenge was the allegorical style of the alchemical texts. A common allegory was the *conjunctio* of pairs of opposites: the lower and higher natures, mankind and the Divine, a king and queen, bride and bridegroom, sun and moon, fire and water. The *conjunctio* was often portrayed as the consummation of a mystic marriage.<sup>129</sup> But its outcome was not always the birth of a child; in some instances it was the emergence of an adult androgyne symbolizing synthesis and mutual transformation. The *Aurora Consurgens* boldly suggested that its author was involved in *conjunctio* with *Sapientia* (“Wisdom”), the Latin equivalent of Chokmah/Sophia.<sup>130</sup> Later in the same work, the author took a more cautious position, acknowledging that the *conjunctio* more likely involved heavenly partners united in Christ and that the alchemist was just a guest. The author commented: “When thou hast water from earth, air from water, fire from air, earth from fire, then shalt thou fully and perfectly process [our] art.”<sup>131</sup>

The more one reads the alchemical texts—at least the more authoritative ones—the more one realizes that they were not procedure manuals but descriptions of the spiritual journey. On the way the seeker had to confront and overcome many challenges, including pairs of opposites. Milestones on the journey, culminating in production of the philosopher’s stone and demonstration of transmutation, were initiations.

As early as the Middle Ages correspondences were noted between the transmutation of base metals into gold and the transubstantiation of the Eucharistic elements into the body and blood of Christ.

Those correspondences were taken seriously and, for the most part, were approached with great reverence. The philosopher’s stone was often compared with Christ, himself the offspring of a mystic marriage. Psychologist Carl Jung identified the parents as the Holy Spirit

and the Virgin Mary;<sup>132</sup> perhaps we would suggest God the Father and the divine Mother—sadly excluded from the trinity. Less reverent was an early sixteenth-century satire by Nicholas Melchior of Hermannstadt, who formatted instructions for the alchemical process to resemble the liturgy of the Mass.<sup>133</sup> Although no explicit reference was made to the consecration, Jung judged the work to be in bad taste.<sup>134</sup> By the sixteenth-century institutional Christianity’s tolerance for alchemy had changed into the same kind of outright hostility it displayed toward magic.

In one important respect, the alchemists’ task was more challenging than the priests’. The faithful were satisfied to believe that the *substance* of the bread and wine was transformed. Alchemists and their sponsors wanted to see the *accidents* of the lead transformed too.

### Transformation of Consciousness

The transformation of physical elements in the Eucharist and alchemy can hardly be considered unimportant, but in both cases a significant and enduring expansion of consciousness was believed to accompany the physical process. Many other examples are found in western esotericism in which individuals experience transformative expansions of consciousness. In their totality such experiences invigorate the whole human race and move humanity forward on its evolutionary path.

The great mystics all reported experiences that left them permanently changed. The progression from purgation to illumination, to use Underhill’s terminology; ecstatic episodes that overwhelmed the senses, emotions and intellect; and the emergence from the dark night of the soul to union with the Divine are described as qualitatively different from ordinary human experience. Near-death experiences often are described in similar terms;<sup>135</sup> individuals return with a new sense of the unity and eternity of life and the transience of physical existence.

Some expansions of consciousness are so profound and enduring as to suggest transition from purely human nature to something closer to the divine. Hints of such a possibility can be found in scripture. The psalmists wrote: “Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we

may know that ye [are] gods”<sup>136</sup> and “I have said, Ye are gods; and all of you are children of the most High.”<sup>137</sup> Christ referred to those passages when he asked “Is it not written in your law . . . Ye are gods?”<sup>138</sup> He demonstrated his own divinity—and perhaps the possibility of moving from the human to the divine—in the transfiguration on Mount Tabor.<sup>139</sup> A passage in *2 Peter* makes the bold claim:

According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be *partakers of the divine nature*.<sup>140</sup>

Athanasius, patriarch of Alexandria, famously built upon *John 1:14* to declare: “He [the Logos] was made man that we might be made god.” Thus was born the doctrine of *theosis*, or deification.<sup>141</sup>

Gregory of Nyssa declared that theosis was the very purpose of humanity’s creation.<sup>142</sup> Our destiny was to become “priests of the cosmos, rendering by [our] dynamic engagement with the world’s order, a degree of divine life, a sacred blessing as it were, to all the fabric of God’s created existence.”<sup>143</sup> Christ’s incarnation was not a repair mission, a response to humanity’s failure; rather, it was the means to unlock humanity’s latent powers and possibilities. Maximus the Confessor (580–662) viewed Christ’s incarnation as a reciprocal coming-together of the divine and human natures, diminishing neither but creating a new, higher synthesis.<sup>144</sup> Gregory Palamas (1296–1359) insisted that we have the potential to experience God’s “uncreated light.” The uncreated light was manifest in Christ’s transfiguration, and the seeker was promised an experience of the same light and the ability to gain true spiritual knowledge of God.

Russian Orthodox priest Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944) argued that Christ’s incarnation was motivated by God’s plan to glorify humanity. In response to the plan “Man desires to become a son of God and enter into that glory of creation, and he is predestined to this. Out of natural man, he is called to become a god-

man.”<sup>145</sup> The glorification of humanity was begun at the incarnation and completed when Christ ascended into heaven. “The God-Man’s earthly humanity follows His Ascension to heaven, first the Most Holy Mother of God, and then the entire Church in the age to come.”<sup>146</sup> Mary has already achieved “perfect theosis.”<sup>147</sup>

From time to time, the whole human race undergoes an expansion of consciousness. That is the objective of every avatar. Christ, greatest of the avatars, exemplified self-sacrifice and universal love, and—to invoke the teachings on theosis—unlocked our divine potential. Francis of Assisi, Seraphim of Sarov, Mother Teresa, and many others allowed their inner divinity to shine forth through the expression of sacrificial love. The insights of scholars, like Euclid, Augustine of Hippo, Newton, Darwin and Einstein changed humanity’s intellectual paradigm: the way we think about ourselves and the world. The legacy of great artists and composers lives on, and in some cases their work comes to be appreciated more than in their own times. Great political leaders gave us nationhood, secure prosperity, and at least a glimpse of democracy and freedom.<sup>148</sup>

Significant numbers of people are acquiring new physical and mental abilities. These abilities may anticipate the characteristics of the future sixth root race or may be actual characteristics of the sixth subrace currently emerging. Healing gifts are being discovered and utilized on an unprecedented scale. Certain people experience *synesthesia*, a condition in which they see colors when hearing sounds, or vice versa. Esoteric teachings tell us that color and sound merge on higher planes, and synesthetes may be forerunners in a more general elevation of consciousness to those planes.<sup>149</sup>

Savantism, the genetic condition in which certain people suffering from autism exhibit exceptional mathematical or other gifts, has long been recognized by medical science. More recent studies have shown that trauma to the frontal lobes of the brain can unlock comparable, and previously unsuspected, mathematical, musical or artistic talents, without significant sacrifice of other cognitive or behavioral functions.<sup>150</sup> This latter condition, referred to as *acquired savantism*, suggests the possibility that

exceptional abilities could be triggered intentionally by less-traumatic kinds of brain stimulation. Whether or not that dream can be realized—and what ethical questions it might raise—acquired savantism provides evidence of innate mental and creative potential extending far beyond what is presently considered “normal.”

Exceptional abilities are exhibited by certain stigmatics in the West and by certain Indian holy men and women. Most common are *inedia*, the ability to live for years without eating, or sometimes even drinking; and voluntary insomnia, the ability to live without sleeping.<sup>151</sup> The person’s health does not seem to suffer, and energy levels remain high. Some stigmatics also acquire the ability to experience scenes at a distance or scenes from the past.<sup>152</sup> Another ability is xenoglossy, to speak languages never studied—and sometimes languages known by only a few experts with whom the stigmatic never had contact.

Medical intuitives routinely diagnose disease without the use of radiology or pathological testing. At least one other intuitive claims the ability to read the “etheric stream” in scriptural texts to discern the author’s motives and the power of the inspiring source. “[I]f a text was inspired by divine power, it is strongly impressed and stands out high above the lines of physical text.”<sup>153</sup> These various abilities point to radical changes in the etheric and mental bodies, and perhaps the awakening of higher bodies.

## Reincarnation, the Missing Theme?

**B**elief in reincarnation made few inroads into western esotericism and can hardly be labeled a *pervasive* theme. Some comments are warranted, however, because belief was strong in Greek culture and the religious philosophy of South Asia, and it has become a key element of modern esoteric teachings. An important question is why it never became pervasive in western esotericism during the period under consideration.

Pythagoras famously believed in reincarnation—even in metempsychosis, rebirth in ani-

mal bodies, whereupon he became a vegetarian. Plato, too, explored the reality and implications of reincarnation. In his dialogue *Phaedo*, Cebes addresses Socrates thus:

Your favorite doctrine, Socrates, that knowledge is simply recollection, if true, also necessarily implies a previous time in which we learned that which we now recollect. But this would be impossible unless our soul was in some place before existing in the human form; here, then, is another argument of the soul’s immortality.<sup>154</sup>

Plotinus and fellow Neoplatonist Porphyry (c.234–c.305) both spoke of the reincarnation of the soul. The Gnostic Valentinus divided people into three types according to the progress they had made toward achieving gnosis. The most advanced, the *pneumatics*, were expected to attain gnosis in their present lifetimes and would no longer need to incarnate. The *psychics* were making progress but required additional lifetimes before they attained gnosis. The *choics* were still firmly imprisoned in the physical world, and no escape could be foreseen for them.

The afterlife was never discussed in the Torah, and the later books of the Hebrew Bible were silent as to what form it might take. Yet when Judaism came under Hellenic influence, the discussion of personal immortality became more common, and some Pharisees allegedly embraced a belief in reincarnation. Such belief may also have spread among ordinary people.

A few passages in the New Testament support belief in reincarnation. For example, Christ seemed to identify John the Baptist as the reincarnation of Elijah:

[H]is disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elias [Elijah] must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.<sup>155</sup>

The Palestinian Jews to whom Christ was speaking evidently understood the concept of rebirth, and people in the Greek-speaking areas, where nascent Christianity made its biggest inroads, were even more likely to do so. It is safe to conclude that belief in reincarnation was not uncommon in the early church. The *pneuma* was probably assumed, as it had been in Platonism, to preexist the creation of a body and to survive its death by rebirth in new bodies.

Church father Origen Adamantius (c.184–c.253) never discussed reincarnation, but he taught that the soul preexisted the body,<sup>156</sup> obviously a necessary prerequisite. It is widely claimed that Origen's teachings on preexistence, and by implication belief in reincarnation, were condemned by the Second Council of Constantinople (553 CE). But nowhere in the council's proceedings is Origen's condemnation mentioned, and it is doubtful whether the bishops ever voted on such a measure. No ecumenical council, *ex-cathedra* papal decree, or other authoritative pronouncement by a representative religious body has ever directly addressed the issue of reincarnation.

In the Roman and Eastern Orthodox churches, which accept the Second Council of Constantinople as authentic, a tradition developed that the soul is newly created at conception, or shortly thereafter; that it incarnates for a single lifetime, and—possibly after a stint in purgatory or some other “intermediate state”—spends eternity in heaven or hell.<sup>157</sup>

Anglicans and Protestants do not accept the council's authenticity, but for the most part they have accepted the same tradition. Anglican clergyman William Law—whose views on the divine spark were mentioned earlier—echoed Origen in expressing belief in the pre-existence of the soul: “The essence of our souls can never

cease to be, because they never began to be, and nothing can live eternally but that which has lived from all Eternity.”<sup>158</sup> But belief in reincarnation by significant numbers of Christians had to wait until the twentieth century.<sup>159</sup>

Belief in reincarnation never became part of mainstream Judaism during the Common Era.

**The more one reads the alchemical texts—at least the more authoritative ones—the more one realizes that they were not procedure manuals but descriptions of the spiritual journey. On the way the seeker had to confront and overcome many challenges, including pairs of opposites. Milestones on the journey, culminating in production of the philosopher's stone and demonstration of transmutation, were initiations.**

But it survived in the Judaic Kabbalah, as is evident in the *Bahir* and the *Zohar*, two of the most important Kabbalistic texts. Scholars of the Safed period referred to reincarnation as *gilgul*, a term capturing the concept of “revolving,” or “turning over,” and derived from the Hebrew word for “wheel.”<sup>160</sup> The term immediately calls to mind Hindu and Buddhist teachings on the “wheel of rebirth.”

Belief in reincarnation continued among Kabbalists even into the eighteenth century. Italian Rabbi Moses Chaim Luzzatto (1707–1746) observed: “Not all souls are equal, the new are not like the old, and the reincarnated once is not like the reincarnated twice.”<sup>161</sup> Elsewhere he observed: “The *tzadikim* [saints] reincarnate up to a thousand generations, the sinners up to four.”<sup>162</sup> On the other hand, rebirth was not always viewed favorably; it could be seen as evidence of failure. Interestingly, the worst possible outcome, in the view of the Kabbalists, was exile from the divine presence and the community of Jewish people,<sup>163</sup> whereupon the collective suffering would be focused on that hapless individual. More generally, the assumption took hold, as it had in Christianity, that reincarnation was incompatible with orthodox Judaic teachings.

Mainstream Christian and Judaic opposition to belief in reincarnation was accepted without significant resistance. Neither did such belief play any significant role in early Rosicrucian or Masonic teachings.<sup>164</sup> Evidently, the western

mindset preferred to focus on the present lifetime, without concern for karmic effects carried over from previous lives, or carried forward to the future. Perhaps that focus is understandable, given the practicality valued so highly in the West. But it failed, among much else, to provide an explanation for suffering—especially for what appears to be great inequity in the way it strikes. It also resulted in an unreasonable fear of death. Some commentators have suggested that repressing belief in reincarnation enhanced the power of ecclesiastical authorities who, as gatekeepers to the afterlife, could manipulate people during their “one life” with the threat of eternal punishment in hell. Whether such a cynical view of religion has any merit lies outside the scope of present discussion.

## Conclusions

Western esotericism flourished during the Common Era, as it had for centuries or millennia before. But with no unifying organizational structure, it was highly fragmented. Significant expressions of esotericism existed within institutional Christianity and Judaism as well as in the various occult fraternities, societies, movements and bodies of teachings that developed on the fringes of, or outside, the religious domain.

Institutional religion bears much of the blame for the fragmentation. Religious authorities encouraged belief in the unseen world and nurtured important work on speculative theology, so long as it was under their control and anointed as “orthodox.” They were less supportive of other forms of esotericism, even in their own midst. Rome was wary of mysticism and mystical theology; the Calvinists rejected ritual and the sacraments, and the rabbinic establishment was hostile to the Kabbalah. Religious authorities misunderstood and distrusted alchemy and ceremonial magic and went to considerable lengths to suppress them. Spiritual healing was discouraged by Pope Gregory I, on the grounds that sickness was punishment for sin, and western Christianity offered no active healing ministry from the eighth to the eighteenth century.<sup>165</sup>

Yet offsetting fragmentation, during the first nineteen centuries of the Common Era, was the intrinsic power of esotericism’s own mindset,

ideas and practices. People even in radically different environments responded to similar impulses, drew the same conclusions in their quests for truth, and engaged in some of the same occult activities.

The present article has identified “six themes”—teachings, beliefs and practices—that spanned multiple segments of western esotericism and expressed that cohesive power. By examining these themes, this article and two preceding articles have attempted to capture the broadest features of western esotericism. As might be expected, the themes were not entirely independent, and several instances have been noted in which ideas flow from one to another.

Two themes involved beliefs: concerning the nature of God and the human constitution. Theologians and philosophers aligned with major religious institutions made great strides in explaining the nature of God. But important contributions also came from individuals and groups that the religious establishment regarded as heretical.

Throughout history, the vast majority of people have believed in God, but “God” is a nebulous concept. An infinite, transcendent Godhead is remote from human experience; not surprisingly, people searched for expressions of Deity more accessible to human understanding and with which they might form relationships. One approach was to compromise on transcendence and turn the Godhead into an anthropomorphic Father or Mother figure. Another was to recognize that divine manifestations exist, intermediate between the Godhead and ourselves.

Despite its ostensible monotheism, biblical Judaism acknowledged a few such manifestations, including the Ruach Kodesh, or “Holy Spirit.” Egyptian religion, Greek philosophy, orthodox and Gnostic Christian theology, and the Kabbalah created a much richer, if not entirely consistent, account of divine manifestations. The trinity clearly caught the imagination of the people of Christian Europe. The seeds were even sown for the concept of septenary manifestation, which modern esoteric teachings elucidated in the twentieth century as the seven rays.

Writers both inside and outside organized religion discussed the human constitution, often establishing parallels between it and the nature of God. Religious authorities were reluctant to admit that every human being contains—or at the very core *is*—a divine spark, a fragment of divine essence. And those in western Europe who held such a view were marginalized. Fortunately, the eastern church fathers and theologians in the Orthodox Churches affirmed that we have the potential for unlimited development, even to the point of attaining divine nature. The optimistic doctrine of theosis contrasts starkly with the Calvinist view that the majority of people are predestined, from the very moment of their existence, to eternal punishment in hell.

Another theme was the establishment of formal communities with esoteric associations. The fraternities discussed in “Occult Orders” were the primary examples of esoteric communities outside the religious domain. Within institutional Christianity were the cloistered monastic orders, as well as institutions, like the orders of friars, Jesuits, and lay sodalities, in which the sense of community was subjective. Many new types of communities have emerged in recent times, including communes and eco-communities.

Group consciousness, in the sense of universal brother- and sisterhood, can be traced back to the teachings of Christ, the Stoics, and others; but it has been slow to take root in the human psyche. Almost by definition membership of a community implies a degree of collective loyalty and commitment to mutual support. But many types of communities were insular and self-serving, ignoring the needs of people outside their walls. Religious communities were the most generous in their outreach and came closest to expressing true group consciousness.

The most pervasive of the various themes was participation in ritual: combinations of words and actions of symbolic, and in some cases invocative, value. While its specific forms and intent varied from one segment of western esotericism to another, almost all segments engaged in some type of ritual, the only significant exceptions being the early Rosicrucians and evangelical Christians. Commentators have

suggested that ritual is particularly suited to the western psyche, and its near-universality supports that contention. Nobody would deny that occult ritual was sometimes abused. But ritual was also used for worthy purposes, and the Christian sacraments were notable examples. Even ceremonial magic was sometimes approached with as much care and reverence as religious ceremony; preparations included fasting and other ascetic practices. Looking back with the benefit of modern esoteric teachings, we can see that inner purity promoted soul-infusion of the personality and helped ensure a high vibration of the energy received and utilized.

A fifth theme was awareness and understanding of the initiatory path. Clearly, we know much more about this topic now from trans-Himalayan teachings. But even prior to the twentieth century, both the religious and the extra-religious segments of western esotericism acquired a significant grasp of the concept of graded expansions of consciousness. Among the types of initiation identified were the “initiatory” sacraments of Christianity, degrees of Masonic organizations, “self initiations” recognized by Rosicrucians, and stages on the mystic path experienced by contemplatives..

The final theme, and the broadest in scope, was transformation. Transformation embodies the optimistic belief that mineral elements, products of the vegetable kingdom, we ourselves, and the planet have not yet reached our full potential but can be changed into something of qualitatively greater significance. Transformative expansions of consciousness clearly have the quality of initiations. Farthest-reaching in importance would be transformation of the very nature of humankind. There is evidence that such transformation is in fact taking place; forerunners of the race are acquiring capabilities and achieving levels of consciousness that surpass any mundane expectations. Yet once we accept the notion of a divine spark in every human being, such radical transformation seems both reasonable and inevitable.

With the progressive expansion of both individual and racial consciousness, many more souls will move from the human kingdom to what the trans-Himalayan teachers refer to as

the kingdom of souls. Eventually, we shall attain monadic consciousness, or “identification.” The doctrine of theosis may be a glimpse of that distant stage on the human journey.

Reincarnation was a “missing theme” in western esotericism. Its conspicuous absence as a coherent theme—contrasting with its pervasiveness in antiquity, in esoteric systems elsewhere in the world, and in modern esoteric teachings—cannot be attributed solely to repression by religious authorities. Rather, the western mindset seems to have been narrowly focused on the present lifetime. Yet by ignoring the reality of reincarnation, people faced avoidable philosophical difficulties and denied themselves awareness of the richness of evolution through multiple lifetimes. A long sequence of incarnations is necessary if we are to express our innate divinity.

<sup>1</sup> The objection that speculative theology led to dogmatic decrees, which are exoteric in nature, must be answered by ecclesiastical authorities, not by theologians. Theologians were simply using the intellect to explore hidden orders of reality.

<sup>2</sup> John F. Nash, “Occult Orders in Western Esotericism,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2014), 75-104.

<sup>3</sup> John F. Nash, “Christology: Toward a Synthesis of Christian Doctrine and Esoteric Teachings,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Winter 2012), 37-61.

<sup>4</sup> E. A. Wallis Budge, *Egyptian Religion* (London: Citadel Press, 1900/1997), 115.

<sup>5</sup> Once a year, on the feast of Yom Kippur, the high priest pronounced the name of the deity in the privacy of the Holy of Holies. Otherwise the name was considered too powerful to utter. Since YHVH was known only by its consonants, we do not know how it was pronounced. Gentiles transcribe it as “Jehovah” or “Yahweh.”

<sup>6</sup> For example *Psalms* 51:13; *Isaiah* 63:10. *Ruach*, *Kadesh*, *Shekinah* and *Chokmah* may be capitalized in Christian usage, but the Hebrew language does not offer capitalization.

<sup>7</sup> The rabbinic period followed the destruction of the temple in 70 CE.

<sup>8</sup> *Proverbs* 8:22-30; 9:5; *Wisdom of Solomon* 8:2-5. Grammatical gender does not necessarily imply that personages or influences were viewed as being male or female, but that was so in the case of *Chokmah*, the *Shekinah* and *Sophia*.

<sup>9</sup> Plato, *Republic*, §508-509.

<sup>10</sup> Impressed, Christian historian Eusebius of Caesarea declared Philo a church father!

<sup>11</sup> Perhaps we can see an echo of Philo’s Logos in modern esoteric teachings, where the term is applied to planetary, solar and cosmic deities.

<sup>12</sup> *John* 1:1-14. Elsewhere (e.g., *Luke* 4:36; 10:39), “logos” refers to words of power uttered by Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> Theophilus of Antioch, *Epistle to Autolychum*, II, 15. Theophilus first coined the term *trinitas* (Greek: “three”), from which “Trinity” is derived. This Theophilus is not to be confused with the fourth-century Theophilus, patriarch of Alexandria.

<sup>14</sup> Given the misogyny of early Christianity, the gender imbalance probably was not considered a disadvantage at the time. But we can see that the all-male (or male-neuter) trinity had far-reaching consequences in denying women a suitable divine archetype.

<sup>15</sup> Today it is becoming common to refer to the Holy Spirit as “she.”

<sup>16</sup> *Tripartite Tractate* (trans., H. W. Attridge & D. Mueller), §15. Online: <http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/tripart.htm>. (Last accessed November 17, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> The trinitarian doctrine was formulated by the Councils of Nicea (325) and Constantinople (381). Hypostases, or distinct divine realities, can be compared with the *partzufim* of the theoretical Kabbalah.

<sup>18</sup> Eastern Orthodox Christianity retains the original Nicene language that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father alone. The western church modified the creed to state that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and Son, provoking the great schism of 1054.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1910), ch. 8, § 67. In the early 20th century a similar charge was brought by the Russian Orthodox Church against Sergei Bulgakov who proposed that the divine essence was the feminine Sophia.

<sup>20</sup> Jews, along with Muslims, reject trinitarian doctrine as incompatible with the core principle of monotheism.

<sup>21</sup> An alternative trinity can be discerned consisting of *Chokmah*, *Binah* and the “unnumbered” *sephirah* *Daath*.

<sup>22</sup> For a discussion of the *sephiroth* and their properties see John F. Nash, “From the *Zohar* to Safed: Development of the Theoretical Kabbalah,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Summer 2009), 21-46.

- <sup>23</sup> Jakob Böhme, *Four Tables of Divine Revelation*, London, 1654. Reproduced in Robin Waterfield, ed., *Jacob Boehme* (Berkeley, CA: North Atlantic, 2001), 214-217. Böhme's placement of Sophia at the end of his septenary recalls the customary association of *Malkuth*, lowest of the sephiroth, with the Shekinah.
- <sup>24</sup> *Revelation* 1:4, 3:1, 4:5, 5:6. Unless otherwise stated, all biblical quotes are from the King James Bible.
- <sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 5:1, 5.
- <sup>26</sup> John F. Nash, *Quest for the Soul* (Bloomington, IN: 1stBooks Library, 2004), 28-32.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* In Egypt and other ancient societies only persons high up in the social order had names. Having one's name remembered was believed to hold the key to immortality. Invading enemies would erase names from tombs to ensure the occupants' final annihilation.
- <sup>28</sup> *Psalms* 146:1.
- <sup>29</sup> *1 Samuel* 16:14.
- <sup>30</sup> *Job* 4:9.
- <sup>31</sup> The Homeric poems were written sometime before the sixth century BCE. Precisely when Homer lived, and whether in fact he was a real person, are debated by modern scholars.
- <sup>32</sup> The dualism betrayed Platonic origins—duly exaggerated—but it may also have been influenced by Zoroastrianism. In contrast to Valentinian Gnosticism, the *Gospel of Thomas*, sometimes classified as a Gnostic text, suggests that God's spirit can be found in nature: "Split a piece of wood, and I am there. Lift up the stone and you will find me there" (Saying 30).
- <sup>33</sup> Irenaeus *Against Heresies*, book 1, 6:1ff (trans., A. Roberts & J. Donaldson), *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, 1867.
- <sup>34</sup> *1 Thessalonians* 5:23.
- <sup>35</sup> *Luke* 1:46-47.
- <sup>36</sup> Fourth Council of Constantinople, canon 11 and preamble. Online: [http://www.documenta-catholicaomnia.eu/03d/0869-0869,\\_Concilium\\_Constantinopolitanum\\_IV,\\_Documenta\\_Omnia,\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documenta-catholicaomnia.eu/03d/0869-0869,_Concilium_Constantinopolitanum_IV,_Documenta_Omnia,_EN.pdf). The council is not regarded as a major ecumenical council, and some historians claim that the outcome was distorted by voting irregularities.
- <sup>37</sup> Thomas Aquinas, "De anima," *Disputations*. 1269; also: "De spiritualibus creaturis," *Disputations*. 1267.
- <sup>38</sup> Eastern Orthodox Churches recognize a separate "Fourth Council of Constantinople," which met at a different time.
- <sup>39</sup> Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2001), 109.
- <sup>40</sup> Meister Eckhart, Sermon 6, "The Greatness of the Human Person," reproduced in Matthew Fox, *Passion for Creation* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1990), 103.
- <sup>41</sup> Theresa of Ávila, *Interior Castle*, trans., E. A. Peers (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1946/2007), 152.
- <sup>42</sup> William Law, *The Spirit of Prayer*, part I, London: Ogles, et al., 1816, 51.
- <sup>43</sup> *Zohar*, 5. *Lech Lecha*: 12, verse 96, Kabbalah Centre International, 2003.
- <sup>44</sup> Large numbers of Jews, expelled from Spain in 1492, made their way to Safed in Palestine. Within fifty years Safed became the focus of a golden age of Kabbalism (succeeding another in Moorish Spain). Its most famous exponents were Moses ben Jacob Cordovero (1522–1570) and Isaac ben Solomon Luria (1534–1572). See Nash, "From the *Zohar* to Safed: Development of the Theoretical Kabbalah."
- <sup>45</sup> Pinchas of Koretz, *Nofeth Tzufim*. Quoted in Louis I. Newman, *The Hasidic Anthology* (New York: Schocken), 452.
- <sup>46</sup> Éliphas Lévi, *Key to the Mysteries* (trans., S. L. MacGregor Mathors). Lévi's real name was Alphonse Louis Constant. "Papus" was a pseudonym for Gérard Encausse.
- <sup>47</sup> Papus, *Qabalah* (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1977), 190.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>49</sup> The end of persecution and Christianization of the empire were not universally welcomed. Some people felt driven to identify with Jesus' passion and death through personal "martyrdom" in the form of extreme asceticism.
- <sup>50</sup> *Psalms* 119:164.
- <sup>51</sup> The first such order, the Order of Poor Clares, was founded by Clare of Assisi and Francis of Assisi in 1212
- <sup>52</sup> *Matthew* 5:43-48.
- <sup>53</sup> *Acts* 2:44-45.
- <sup>54</sup> Epictetus, *Discourses*, book ii, ch. 5. Online: <http://www.constitution.org/rom/epicdisc2.htm#2:05>. (Last accessed June 15, 2014).
- <sup>55</sup> Quoted in: Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1963/1977), p. 79.
- <sup>56</sup> Nash, "Occult Orders in Western Esotericism."
- <sup>57</sup> Gareth Knight, "Work of the Inner Plane Adepts," Introduction to Dion Fortune, *The Esoteric Orders and Their Work* (St Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1978), 21. The statement

- was attributed to an unnamed adept. The trans-Himalayan teachings divide the evolution of human forms into root races, and then into subraces. The fifth, Nordic, subrace of the fifth root race was the latest to come into being, though a sixth subrace may be now coming into manifestation. It must be emphasized that root races and subraces refer to bodies, not to the indwelling lives. Advanced souls may choose to incarnate in bodies of an earlier subrace, or of the third and fourth root races which remain on the planet.
- <sup>58</sup> Jewish mysticism commonly spoke of seventy-two names of God, but the Sephardic Jew Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia (b.1240) famously constructed thousands more by permutation of letters.
- <sup>59</sup> Geog Dehn, ed. *The Book of Abramelin: a New Translation*, trans., S Guth (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2006), book 3, 75ff. The Holy Guardian Angel is the direct equivalent of the Solar Angel in trans-Himalayan teachings.
- <sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, book 1, ch. 2, 5.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, book 3, ch. 37, 587.
- <sup>62</sup> Henry C. Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, trans., J. Freake, reprint (Woodbury, MN: Llewellyn, 1651/2006), book 2, ch. 26, 339.
- <sup>63</sup> Dehn, ed. *The Book of Abramelin: a New Translation*, 90-96.
- <sup>64</sup> *Genesis* 17:10-14.
- <sup>65</sup> *Exodus* 25:8.
- <sup>66</sup> *Leviticus* 24:5-8. For a detailed discussion of the Bread of the Presence, see Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist* (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 120ff.
- <sup>67</sup> *Exodus* 25:29, NRSV. By contrast the KJV merely states “[T]hou shalt make the dishes thereof, and spoons thereof, and covers thereof, and bowls thereof, to cover withal.”
- <sup>68</sup> *Exodus* 28:2-5.
- <sup>69</sup> *Exodus* 31:8-11.
- <sup>70</sup> *Leviticus* 1:2.
- <sup>71</sup> *Genesis* 22:1-13.
- <sup>72</sup> The Last Supper is generally assumed to have been the Jewish Seder. But Anglican monk Dom Gregory Dix has suggested that it was a *Chaburah*, or religious gathering of friends.
- <sup>73</sup> *Ephesians* 5:18-19. See also *Colossians* 3:16. Those two texts were long attributed to the Apostle Paul, but modern scholarship now suspects that they were written in his name by another author, the “Deutero-Paul.”
- <sup>74</sup> Jacques Henry, *Mozart the Freemason* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1991/2006), especially 3.
- <sup>75</sup> Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, book 3, ch. 64, 672.
- <sup>76</sup> Éliphas Lévi, *The History of Magic*, trans., A. E. Waite (New York: Samuel Weiser, 1913/1969), 374.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.
- <sup>78</sup> Dion Fortune, *The Training and Work of an Initiate* (Wellingborough, U.K.: Aquarian Press, 1930), 78.
- <sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.
- <sup>80</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1954), 34-35.
- <sup>81</sup> Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Hidden Life in Freemasonry* (Adyar, India: Theosophical University Press, 1926), 132.
- <sup>82</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis, 1957), 514.
- <sup>83</sup> Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, trans., R. Gordon (New York: Routledge, 2000), 131ff.
- <sup>84</sup> *Rule of St Benedict*, §58.17.
- <sup>85</sup> The Merkabah system of Jewish mysticism originated in the first century BCE and reached its peak in the early centuries of the Common Era. The word *Merkabah* derived from the early Hebrew word for “chariot” and referred to Elijah’s ascent to heaven at the end of his earthly life (2 *Kings* 2:11).
- <sup>86</sup> Gershom G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary Press, 2012).
- <sup>87</sup> Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2001), 19-20, 46-49.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 19-20, 54-56.
- <sup>89</sup> Theresa of Ávila, *Interior Castle*, trans., E. A. Peers (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1946/2007), 15. *Ezekiel* 10:1 referred to “a sapphire stone, as the appearance of the likeness of a throne.”
- <sup>90</sup> Climacus acquired his name from *klimax*, the Greek for “ladder.”
- <sup>91</sup> King, *Christian Mystics*, 130.
- <sup>92</sup> John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*, trans., E. A. Peers (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003), 90-96.
- <sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.
- <sup>95</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *The Mystic Way* (Atlanta, GA: Ariel Press, 1913/1992), 52ff.
- <sup>96</sup> John F. Nash, “Prayer and Meditation in Christian Mysticism,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Fall 2011). 17-41.
- <sup>97</sup> Max Heindel, *The Rosicrucian Philosophy in Questions and Answers*, 3/e, vol. I, §6:131

- (Oceanside, CA: Rosicrucian Fellowship, 1922), 262. Emphasis removed.
- <sup>98</sup> Paul E. Schiller, *Rudolf Steiner and Initiation* (Spring Valley, NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1981), 86-88. One of Steiner's lectures addressing the topic is available in audio form: <http://www.rudolfsteineraudio.com/thechristianmystery/4-5christianmystery.mp3>. (Last accessed October 2, 2013).
- <sup>99</sup> Rudolf Steiner, lecture, Karlsruhe, Germany, October 14, 1911. Included in *From Jesus to Christ* (Forest Row, UK: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1991), 165.
- <sup>100</sup> Rudolf Steiner, lecture, Karlsruhe, Germany, October 5, 1911. Online: <http://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/FromJ2C1973/19111005p02.html>. (Last accessed October 2, 2013).
- <sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>102</sup> See the series of lectures by Robert Gilbert, of the Vesica Institute, NC. Online: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0WO2rT8M8OI>. (Last accessed October 1, 2013).
- <sup>103</sup> Dion Fortune, *The Esoteric Orders and Their Work* (St Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1978), 85. Fortune's description of Adepts and Masters is almost the opposite of what is found in the trans-Himalayan teachings; there all individuals who have attained the fifth initiation—the level of human perfection in that system—are Adepts, while the subset of Adepts who choose to work with humanity are designated Masters.
- <sup>104</sup> John F. Nash, "Esoteric Perspectives on the Eucharist," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Summer 2008), 43-56.
- <sup>105</sup> *Genesis* 14:18-19. Gilbert also referenced Steiner's 1906-1907 initiatory grades.
- <sup>106</sup> *Proverbs* 9:5.
- <sup>107</sup> *Mark* 14:22-24. *Mark's* description of the Last Supper probably provided the source for *Matthew* 26:20-30; *Luke* 22:14-38; and *John* 13:4ff.
- <sup>108</sup> *Luke* 24:30-34.
- <sup>109</sup> *John* 6:35.
- <sup>110</sup> *John* 15:1, 5.
- <sup>111</sup> *John* 2:3.
- <sup>112</sup> *John* 6:55-56.
- <sup>113</sup> *Didache*, ch. 9 (trans., A. Roberts & J. Donaldson). Online: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/didache-roberts.html>. (Last accessed March 19, 2014). Note that the wine was offered before the bread.
- <sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 103-40.
- <sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-6.
- <sup>116</sup> Justin Martyr, *First Apology* §66 (trans., A. Roberts & J. Donaldson). Online: <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-firstapology.html>. (Last accessed March 20, 2014).
- <sup>117</sup> Radbertus Paschasius, *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* ("On the Body and Blood of the Lord"), 831-844 CE. Online: [http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z\\_07900865\\_\\_Paschasius\\_Radbertus\\_Corbeiensis\\_Abbas\\_\\_De\\_Corpore\\_Et\\_Sanguine\\_Domini\\_Liber\\_MLT.pdf.html](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/04z/z_07900865__Paschasius_Radbertus_Corbeiensis_Abbas__De_Corpore_Et_Sanguine_Domini_Liber_MLT.pdf.html). (Last accessed March 29, 2014)
- <sup>118</sup> Fourth Lateran Council, Canon 1. 1215, H. J. Schroeder, ed. *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils* (St Louis, MO: B. Herder, 1937), 236-296.
- <sup>119</sup> Martin Luther, *Confession Concerning Christ's Supper*, 1528. Included in *Luther's Works*, vol. 37 (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1986), 299-300.
- <sup>120</sup> John F. Nash, *The Sacramental Church* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 245-246.
- <sup>121</sup> Hans U. von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, vol. 1 (Fort Collins, CO: Ignatius Press, 1961), 574-575. Parenthesis and italicization in original.
- <sup>122</sup> P. Teilhard de Chardin, *Hymn of the Universe*, trans., G. Vann (London: Collins, 1965), 13.
- <sup>123</sup> Marie-Louise von Franz ed. *Aurora Consurgens* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 2000). Von Franz lays out the case for Aquinas' authorship in her introduction.
- <sup>124</sup> The identity of "Philip à Gabella," mentioned in the first of the two works, is unknown. The primary Rosicrucian manifestos, both anonymous, were the *Fama Fraternitatis* and the *Confessio Fraternitatis*.
- <sup>125</sup> Paracelsus' full name was Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus Von Hohenheim.
- <sup>126</sup> Paracelsus, Prologue to "Of Occult Philosophy," treatise II, ch. 1, p. 30. Quote transcribed into modern American English.
- <sup>127</sup> Paracelsus, "Secrets of Alchemy," treatise II, ch.8, p. 28. Quote transcribed into modern American English.
- <sup>128</sup> Paracelsus. "An Election of Time to be Observed in the Transmutation of Metals." *The Archidoxis*, treatise II, ch. 1, p. 159-160.
- <sup>129</sup> The term "chemical wedding" was also common. For example, one of the Rosicrucian Manifestos was *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosencreutz*, published in 1616.
- <sup>130</sup> *Aurora Consurgens*, fifth parable. Marie-Louise von Franz ed. trans., R. Hull & A. Glover (Inner City Books, 2000), 101-102. See also the commentary by Marie-Louise von Franz, 319. Von Franz present evidence that the *Aurora* was written by Thomas Aquinas.

- <sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, sixth parable, 129-131, and von Franz' commentary, 358-361. Note that the Latin *Sapi-entia* is the direct equivalent of the Hebrew *Chokmah* and the Greek *Sophia*.
- <sup>132</sup> Carl Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy* 2/e. trans. R. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), 345ff.
- <sup>133</sup> Melchior of Hermannstad., *Processus sub forma missae*, c.1525. See Farkas G. Kiss, et al., "The Alchemical Mass of Nicolaus Melchior Cibinensis: Text, Identity and Speculations," *AMBIX* (vol. 53, no. 2, July 2006), 143-159.
- <sup>134</sup> Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, 406.
- <sup>135</sup> See for example Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).
- <sup>136</sup> *Isaiah* 41:23.
- <sup>137</sup> *Psalms* 82:6.
- <sup>138</sup> *John* 10:34.
- <sup>139</sup> *Luke* 9:28-31.
- <sup>140</sup> *2 Peter* 1:3-4. Emphasis added.
- <sup>141</sup> John F. Nash, "Theosis: a Christian Perspective on Human Destiny," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2011), 15-33.
- <sup>142</sup> J. A. McGuckin, "The Strategic Adaptation of Deification," *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 105-107.
- <sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.
- <sup>144</sup> Elena Vishnevskaya, "Divinization as Perichoretic Embrace in Maximus the Confessor," *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 134-136.
- <sup>145</sup> Sergei Bulgakov, *The Lamb of God*, trans., B. Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1933/2008), 187.
- <sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 405.
- <sup>147</sup> Boris Jakim, "Sergius Bulgakov: Russian *Theosis*," *Partakers of the Divine Nature*, 253.
- <sup>148</sup> Nationhood is often criticized today as separate, but many great nations were created to replace feudalism (e.g.: Britain, France), foreign occupation (the United States, India), fragmentation (Germany, Italy), or racial apartheid (South Africa).
- <sup>149</sup> Reportedly painter Vincent van Gogh and composer Alexander Scriabin were synesthetes. Some synesthetes even "taste" sounds or colors.
- <sup>150</sup> Darold A. Treffert, "Accidental Genius," *Scientific American* (August 2014), 52-57. Acquired savantism has been studied in cases involving concussion, lightning strikes, and frontotemporal dementia.
- <sup>151</sup> John F. Nash, "Stigmata and the Initiatory Path," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Summer 2012), 49-72.
- <sup>152</sup> An example is the contemporary German stigmatic and anthroposophist Judith von Halle.
- <sup>153</sup> Marko Pogačnik, *Christ Power and the Earth Goddess*, trans., anon. (Forres, Scotland: Findhorn Press, 1999), 35-48.
- <sup>154</sup> Plato *Phaedo*, trans., B. Jowett (London: Penguin Books, 1948), §72c-d.
- <sup>155</sup> *Matthew* 17:10-13.
- <sup>156</sup> Origen claimed that the preexistent "souls" were fallen angels punished for their transgressions!
- <sup>157</sup> John F. Nash, "Theosis: a Christian Perspective on Human Destiny," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2011), 15-33.
- <sup>158</sup> William Law, *An Appeal to all that Doubt or Disbelieve the Truths of the Gospel*. Quoted in Désirée Hirst, *Hidden Treasures: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), 194.
- <sup>159</sup> By 2005, 21 percent of Christians in the United States acknowledged belief in reincarnation. See: <http://www.christian-reincarnation.com/ReincBelief.htm>. (Last accessed March 3, 2014).
- <sup>160</sup> Nash, "From the *Zohar* to Safed: Development of the Theoretical Kabbalah."
- <sup>161</sup> Moses Luzzatto, *Klalout Hailan*, trans., R. Afilalo (Quebec: Kabbalah Editions, 2004), ch. 10, 268.
- <sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 267-268. Italics added.
- <sup>163</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), 250.
- <sup>164</sup> Later Rosicrucians embraced a belief in reincarnation, but that reflected the influence of Hinduism, Buddhism, and most importantly the trans-Himalayan teachings.
- <sup>165</sup> Spiritual healing was reintroduced in the 18th century by the Shakers. Sacramental healing was reintroduced in the Anglican Communion, in the early 20th century, and later by the Church of Rome. By contrast, an unbroken tradition of sacramental healing was preserved in the Eastern Orthodox Churches. See John F. Nash, "Esoteric Healing in the Orthodox, Roman and Anglican Churches," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2007), 37-50.