University of Alberta

Disrupting Boundaries: Theurgy, Salvation, and Knowledge in *De arte cabalistica*

by

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Religious Studies

Edmonton, Alberta
Fall, 2007

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-33162-0
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-33162-0

Abstract

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Johannes Reuchlin stated in his introductory dedication of *De arte cabalistica,* published in 1517, to Pope Leo X that his purpose in writing "of the symbolic philosophy of the art of Kabbalah" was to restore ancient wisdom to the light of day.[1] Focusing on its interpretation of Kabbalah as a symbolic art, readers have positioned this text within the genre of Christian Kabbalah, and too often marginalized it with such words as unorthodox, mistaken, irrational, and insignificant. In examining its claim to wisdom, I re-position *De arte cabalistica* as a claim to higher knowledge within the context of a number of early modern discourses. Reuchlin called his methodology contemplation; some of his contemporaries, and scholars have labelled it magic. In this thesis, I attempt to disrupt the judgemental boundary separating contemplation and magic by suggesting that *DAC*, as a theurgical text, encompassed both in its search for knowledge of God.

[1] Johannes Reuchlin, *De Arte Cabalistica* (On the art of the kabbalah), trans. Martin Goodman and Sarah Goodman (New York: Abaris Books, 1983), 37-9.

CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction

Argument

The author of *De arte cabalistica*,[2] in his dedication to Pope Leo X, introduced his text as one of knowledge and methodology. He claimed his purpose was to restore ancient wisdom to its readers through an explication of the symbolic philosophy of the art of Kabbalah. In this thesis, I suggest he does so by disrupting and re-drawing the spatial and temporal boundaries of different discourses, traditions, and philosophies concerned with the acquisition of higher knowledge. I further suggest this disruption challenges the boundaries of a binary complex formulated through pairs of characteristics, one judged 'inferior' against another judged 'superior'. I challenge the placement of *DAC* on the inferior side of this complex by restricting it to a marginalized discourse labelled Christian Kabbalah, or a technique labelled magic. Instead, I place the text within the larger field of Western esoteric discourse, and place this field within the even larger field of Western intellectual and cultural history.

[2] Subsequently referred to as *DAC*.

Kocku von Stuckrad suggests that esoteric discourse[3] has two components; it claims higher knowledge, and it proposes a way to access that higher knowledge. These are also components of religion, philosophy, and science. In finding common ground between seemingly disparate traditions and disciplines, he highlights the transfer of ideas across boundaries in an effort to address common concerns. As he points out, such transfers often lead to "astonishing alliances and parallels."[4] The author's common concern in *DAC* was salvation. The "ancient wisdom" he claimed to reveal was actually an astonishing construction of elements taken from disparate sources that also addressed salvation. In the author's construction, salvation was not just the Christian doctrine of forgiveness of sins through the intercession of Christ. It was also the visual knowledge of God. The way in which he proposed to access that vision was through the symbolic art of Kabbalah.

Von Stuckrad adds further that these dimensions are typically located within a world view that presupposes "a unity of material and non-material realms of reality."[5] In *DAC*, the ability of the seeker to raise himself[6] close to God through manipulation of symbols rested on an early modern European understanding of the universe in which material and immaterial beings moved freely back and forth between the natural

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[3] Von Stuckrad challenges definitions that refer to the esoteric "as something hidden from the majority, as a secret accessible only to a small group of initiates," Kocku von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," *Religion* 35 (2005): 81, or esotericism as a "selection of specific currents in Western culture" [Wouter Hanegraaff], or a "specific form of thought" [Antoine Faivre]. von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," 79, 81.

[4] Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2005), 7. I have taken this summary from von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation."

[5] von Stuckrad, "Western Esotericism: Towards an Integrative Model of Interpretation," 93.

[6] In early modern Europe, 'he' was not an inclusive term!

and supernatural worlds. An understanding of *DAC* as a serious claim to higher knowledge requires an understanding of a world view[7] alien to our own.

Three interdependent elements underpinned this world view. First, God was real, all powerful, and ever-present in daily life. Berndt Hamm defines the *Zeitgeist* of the times as one of piety or *Frömmigkeit*: "the practical realization of religion – of modes of believing, proclaiming, teaching, forming ideas, conceiving and articulating values, fears, hopes, etc. – in such a manner that daily life is formed and informed by it."[8] Second, God was able to act in the world because the boundary between the supernatural and natural worlds, if it existed at all, was porous and hence allowed a multitude of supernatural entities to enter.[9] Robert Scribner writes that for early modern people the supernatural world was "continually present within the material world," "more powerful and potent than mere human agency," and "full of power to help or harm."[10] Third, such an indistinct boundary allowed for connections among everything in the universe.[11] Therefore, paraphrasing the words of the mythical

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[7] I use this concept both in its more general sense as defined in *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion:* "a group's most general, shared ideas concerning life and the world" (1140), and in a narrower sense as "a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape …." Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (L'archéologie du savoir), trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (Great Britain: Tavistock Publications, 1974), 191.

[8] Berndt Hamm, "Normative Centering in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: Observations on Religiosity, Theology, and Iconology," *Journal of Early Modern History* 3, no. 4 (99): 308. See also Robert W. Scribner and C. S. Dixon, *The German Reformation*, 2d ed., Studies in European History, Series Editors Richard Overy, John Breuilly, and Peter Wilson (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 9-10.

[9] Scribner itemizes a vast array of supernatural entities who populated the supernatural world of early modern Europe: God, the Devil and their entourages; holy persons including Mary, the Apostles and the saints; the souls of the damned and of purgatory; strange beings such as will o' the wisps, fiery men and phantom horsemen; pre-Christian creatures such as elves, fairies and sprites. Robert W. Scribner, "Elements of Popular Belief," in *Handbook of European History 1400-1600 Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. J. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, vol. 1: *Structures and Assertions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 236.

[10] Scribner, "Elements of Popular Belief," 234, 236.

[11] von Stuckrad 2005, 4.

Hermes Trismegistus, that which was above was able to affect that which was below.[12] More importantly, activity performed in the world below influenced the world above.[13]

All levels of early modern society, whether rich or poor, educated or illiterate, noble or peasant, depended on some type of ritual interaction to influence the supernatural, from "crudest"[14] superstition to officially sanctioned Church sacrament.[15] Processions enhanced with incense, holy water, and sacred relics proceeded around the church during Mass or on the streets behind the Host during the feast of Corpus Christi; popular drama and carnival festivities centred on the religious calendar.[16] Priests depended on rituals of prayer, music, words of consecration, incense, lights, and wine to influence the supernatural; magicians used incantations, Orphic singing, talismans, amulets, and astrological paintings.[17] Baptismal water sprinkled on a newborn purified its soul from sin[18]; holy water blessed by the priests cured illness in

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[12] "That which is above is like that which is below. . . . And as all things have been derived from one ... so all things are born from this thing ..." From a translation of the Emerald Tablet quoted in Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 168. Scholars and theologians in the Renaissance believed Hermes Trismegistus to be the author of numerous influential texts of magical and philosophical import. They thought he was an Egyptian priest of prophet status contemporary to Moses. He was associated with the Egyptian God Thoth and the Greek God Hermes. We now know that these were pseudepigraphical works. See note 223.

[13] Scribner, "Elements of Popular Belief," 235.

[14] Cameron's use of this adjective highlights the judgement attached to particular rituals. Is there really a difference between a 'holy' relic and an amulet, or a prayer and a magical spell?

[15] Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 13-15.

[16] See Cameron 1991, Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England C.1400 - C.1580* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), Robert W. Scribner, "Ritual and Popular Religion in Catholic Germany at the Time of the Reformation," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35, no. 1 (1984), and Scribner, "Elements of Popular Belief,"

[17] D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: From Ficino to Campanella* (Notre Dame London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), 75-84.

[18] Robert W. Scribner, "The Reformation, Popular Magic, and the 'Disenchantment of the World'," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 3 (1993): 478.

humans and protected cattle.[19] The letters of the divine name properly used not only raised one's soul towards God but also combated ill health and other problems[20]; penitential words spoken in confession brought absolution from sins.

Our world is not the enchanted world of early modern Europe. In the centuries following *DAC's* publication in 1517, we have severed the connections between the material and non-material realms of reality. We draw different boundaries between religious and secular activities as distinct components of daily life, between official and unofficial religion as distinct practices, and between religion and magic as distinct relationships. Judgement patrols these boundaries.[21] However, judgement has more to do with the position and perception of the observer making the judgement rather than the phenomena being judged.[22] Actions judged as "ludicrous heap[s] of recipes and methods stemming from primitive, unscientific notions about nature"[23] on our side of

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[19] Scribner, "Ritual and Popular Religion in Catholic Germany at the Time of the Reformation," 63.

[20] Reuchlin 1983, 351.

[21] For comments on judging Pre-Reformation worldview and religion in relation to Post-Reformation views, see Scribner and Dixon 2003, 9: "We should cease viewing [pre-Reformation religion] through the eyes of [Reformation] reformers and describe it in its own right," and Cameron 1991, 9: "It used to be fashionable to begin any discussion of the origins and background to the Reformation with a long dirge on the weakness, corruption and 'decay' of the European Church and religious life around the year 1500."

[22] Jacob Neusner succinctly summarizes this point. He writes, "What I do is miracle; what you do is magic ... what I know is science, what you know is magic." Jacob Neusner, "Science and Magic, Miracle and Magic in Formative Judaism: The System and the Difference," in *Religion, Science, and Magic in Concert and in Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul V. M. Flesher (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 63. In a discussion of the classification of religions, Smith comments that the most fundamental classification is "'ours' and 'theirs,' often correlated with the distinction between 'true' and 'false,' 'correct' and incorrect.'" Jonathan Z. Smith, "Classification," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000), 39.

[23] Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Eros et magie à la Renaissance, 1484), trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), xvii.

the abyss of time, formed part of "a coherent system, based on the psychic (or rather, spiritual, *pneumatic*) dimension of things"[24] on the other.

Methodology

The distinction between magic, philosophy, and religion is relative. My interpretation of *DAC* as a serious entrant in the search for higher knowledge rests on the postmodernist challenge to the "definite knowability of things."[25] As Charles Peirce has pointed out, the knowability or meaning of a sign depends on the interpretant standing between the signified and the signifier.[26] The interpretant, standing on the shifting ground of context and world view, links together meaning and symbol. This perspective brings into question the modernist understanding of historian as unbiased observer standing outside of history, and the historical enterprise as a piecing together of objective facts into an unchanging unitary whole of truth.

Tomoko Masuzawa[27] seeks to dislodge the scholar from this lofty Archimedean vantage point and place her within the shifting and blowing sands that Masuzawa calls the historical enterprise. She questions the logical progression of origination first (the historical fact), and then reproduction, representation and copy afterwards (historical narrative). If the scholar is the interpretant between signified and

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[24] Couliano 1987, xvii, xx.

[25] Johannes C. Wolfart, "Postmodernism," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (London: Cassell, 2000), 386.

[26] Charles Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs," in *The Philosophical Writings of Peirce*, ed. Justus Buchler (New York: Dover Publications, 1955); discussed in Naomi Janowitz, *Icons of Power: Ritual Practices in Late Antiquity*, The Magic in History Series (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), xxii.

[27] Tomoko Masuzawa, *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

signifier, then perhaps the historical narrative is the point of origin rather than the historical fact. Rather than seeing history as "a truth narrative" pinned onto "the constancy, uniformity, and utter objectivity of natural time," Masuzawa paints a wonderful picture of history drawn in the sand of the Australian outback, only to be blown away by the wind, or immediately erased and replaced by the storyteller telling another story. "Since the sand [pictures] disappear as the scene is changed ... [a] particular story can never be looked at as a unitary whole and no retelling is likely to reproduce the exact arrangements and scene cycles again."[28] This metaphor emphasizes that reality, definitions, and 'truth' come from the present time of the scholar as storyteller, as well as from the past time of the artefact.

From this perspective, the historical enterprise is not a search for the one 'right' interpretation representing objective fact, but rather an effort to present as many interpretations as possible. The project becomes an appreciation of infinity rather than a search for finitude. Moshe Idel draws out this idea of not just appreciating but requiring multiplicity in the writing of several Kabbalists. He quotes R. Moses Hayyim Luzzatto:

> those nuances are numerous and the ancient masters received [a tradition] that all the roots of the souls of Israel are all within the Torah and there are six hundred thousand interpretations to all the Torah, divided between the souls of the six hundred thousand [children of] Israel...This is the reason why though the Torah [as a whole] is infinite, even one of its letters is also infinite, but it is necessary to enflame it and then it will be enflamed, and so too the intellect of man.[29]

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[28] Nancy Munn, *Walibiri Iconography: Graphic Representation and Cultural Symbolism in a Central Australian Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973; reprint Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 72-3; quoted in Masuzawa 1993, 172.

[29] Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 97.

In order to fully understand, one must uncover, or enflame in the words of Luzzatto, as many interpretations as possible.

The acceptance of multiple interpretations disperses the unity of truth into a plurality of meaning contingent on the interpretant or the reader, rather than the author.[30] Such a stance challenges the authority of the author, whether that is the author as scholar like me, or the author as historical fact like the author of *DAC*. Such a stance asks if the point of origin rests with the textual artefact or the scholarly construct, or even if there is ever a point of origin. Masuzawa suggests not: "The order of time itself," she states, "has become somewhat weird"with no beginning, middle, and end.[31] She describes this regression from a point of truth fixed in time towards a truth with no place, status or finality[32] as a monstrous discovery and a trip for modernist scholars towards a strangely convoluted, bad infinity.[33]

Where does this understanding of the historical enterprise leave this scholar about to embark on an engagement with a text that is apparently not the key to truth? The concreteness of the text, which I am holding in my hands with its "comforting materiality," has become elusive and uncreditable.[34] Is it possible to fathom its hidden meaning through the revealed specificity of the many discourses with which *DAC*

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[30] See Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, "Post-Marxism Without Apologies," *New Left Review* 166 (1987), Roland Barthes, "Death of the Author," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), and Roland Barthes, "From Work to Text," in *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

[31] Masuzawa 1993, 13.

[32] Robert Young, "Post-Structuralism: An Introduction," in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1981), 3-6.

[33] Masuzawa 1993, 6, 13.

[34] Hayden White, *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 186.

engaged, and the many interpretations of its readers?[35] I too am grappling in my quest for knowledge with the same problem that has confronted the masters of Kabbalah – with one difference. While they assumed the presence of the 'One' concealed within the multiplicity of its manifestations, I cannot.

I find the answer in a kabbalistic understanding of another text – the Torah, the Book that reveals what it conceals. The One announces its presence through infinite combinations of letters and words written in the Torah. Elliot Wolfson writes, "[t]he significance of the sign is that it points beyond itself to the reality for which there is no sign; the plurality of signs reveals the transcendent one by veiling it in the multiplicity of forms by which it is revealed."[36] Knowing that it is impossible to lift the veil of time to find Truth, I can only add to the plurality of interpretations that point in that direction. Understanding that one can never reach Absolute Truth transforms "a trip towards a strangely convoluted, bad infinity" into a journey of delightful discovery. I then turn to the wisdom of contemporary scholars for their guidance on the journey.

Carolyn Walker Bynum suggests that I walk the journey with a comic stance, recognizing that I am also a character in the story I am telling:

> In comedy, the happy ending is contrived. Thus, a comic stance toward doing history is aware of contrivance, of risk. It always admits that we may be wrong. A comic stance knows there is, in actuality, no ending (happy or otherwise) – that doing history is, for the historian, telling a story that could be told in another way. For this reason, a comic stance welcomes voices hithertofore left outside, not to absorb or mute them but to allow them to object and contradict. Its goal is the

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[35] See Lenn E. Goodman, "Editor's Introduction: Thematizing a Tradition," in *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*, ed. Lenn E. Goodman, Studies in Neoplatonism: Ancient and Modern, General Editor Baine R. Harris, no. 7 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 1, and Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 190-260.

[36] Wolfson 2005, 205.

> pluralistic, not the total. It embraces the partial as partial. And, in such historical writing as in the best comedy, the author is also a character ....
>
> So I see my approach in these essays not as a new method but as a new voice or a new mode in history writing: the partial or provisional voice, the comic mode.[37]

Michel Foucault also suggests that I acknowledge my presence on the journey. He writes that "historians take unusual pains to erase the elements in their work which reveal their grounding in a particular time and place, their preferences in a controversy – the unavoidable obstacles of their passion."[38] John Kitchen suggests that I attempt to negotiate the boundary between objectivity and alterity, and subjectivity and empathy by bracketing my judgement. He says this is "not the view from 'the outside'; at the same time, it is not completely the view from 'the inside' either; it is somewhere in-between."[39] Hayden White warns me not to wander too far off the beaten track. He comments that a postmodernist approach to historical text "holds out the prospect of an infinite 'free play' of interpretative fantasy" that takes one further from ... the origin and subject of the text."[40]

What then does my particular journey look like if I am able to walk it transparently, with a comic stance, hopping across boundaries to find a third path that doesn't stray too far from the straight and narrow that I know will not lead me where I want to go? It appears hilarious and frustrating of course, but more than that here is how I have travelled.

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[37] Caroline W. Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 25.

[38] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," in *The Postmodern History Reader*, ed. Keith Jenkins (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 126.

[39] John Kitchen, "Going Medieval: Paradigm Shifts and the Phenomenological Tendency in the Contemporary Encounter with Medieval Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 14 (2002): 409.

[40] White 1987, 187.

I have used the text as my starting point and guide to explore the many discourses hinted at within its covers. I make no pretence that my research is anything but another interpretation of existing data grounded in text, context, postmodernism, and Kabbalah. With some Latin and German, and very little Hebrew, I have had to depend, for the most part, on translation and secondary literature written in English. Aware of the shortcomings of the English translation of *DAC* from which I have worked,[41] I have checked passages against the Latin when they were crucial to my argument. I have attempted to avoid depending on any translation made from its Hebrew passages. I have not been able to read Reuchlin's letters or his first kabbalistic text[42] directly. I am acutely aware that my voice can only be partial.

However, it is a voice that speaks with passion because I too seek both academic and spiritual knowledge. In questing after higher knowledge, I too disrupt the boundaries and hence hop back and forth between the binaries of scholar/practitioner, outsider/insider, orthodoxy/heresy, and religion/magic. I am both the scholar peering backwards from the outside into the world in which *DAC* was written, and the practitioner accompanying its characters from the inside on their

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[41] There is a discrepancy in the opinion of two reviewers on the quality of the English translation of *DAC*. Hsia writes that the translation is both "accurate and idiomatic. Our translators merit our gratitude for rendering a difficult text accessible for wider reading and for giving Reuchlin the wider recognition he deserves." R. Hsia Po-chia, "De Arte Cabalistica: Review," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 15, no. 4 (1984): 498. In contrast, Ruderman writes that "the translators ... have produced a work of questionable quality which fails to meet the minimal standards of scholarship usually associated with an undertaking of this sort." He critiques the translation on two accounts: numerous mistranslations of Hebrew quotations, and a failure to trace "the process of transmission and transformation of Judaic learning into Christian learning." David Ruderman, "On the Art of the Kabbalah: Review," *Renaissance Quarterly* 37, no. 3 (1984): 433. I suggest that the use to which each reviewer has put the text accounts for this difference. Whereas Ruderman appears concerned with origin and transmission, Hsia seems more interested in the understanding and dissemination of Reuchlin's ideas. As my interest is in line with the latter, I have felt comfortable using this translation for my scholarly purposes.

[42] *De verbo mirifico*, published in 1494.

journey. Like Marranus and Philolaus, I too have found the study of Kabbalah a rewarding journey.[43] It holds the paradox of my academic and spiritual life. On one hand, it supports my academic understanding of multiple interpretations as the foundation of critical thinking; on the other hand, it affirms my spiritual notion that hidden in the multiplicity of forms stands the One.

In accepting that there are many ways to approach the One, I have crossed orthodox configurations of faith to explore methods of contact that some might define as theurgy or magic, and the author of *DAC* as contemplation. I know too well the judgement that accompanies an exploration of the 'inferior' or 'false' side of the binary complex. I believe that with empathy comes understanding and insight, and another delightful paradox. While accepting that *DAC* elicits an infinity of interpretations, all of which add to its richness, I think that mine, if not better, is at least as good as others. If I did not consider this to be so, I would never have bothered to tell the story!

Organization

I have deliberately refrained from mentioning the author of *De arte cabalistica* in my introduction in order to highlight his questionable authority as "originating consciousness."[44] That rests with the reader who stands between the signified and signifier as interpretant. However, unlike Roland Barthes, I do not pronounce the

[43] "We are saddened to tear ourselves away from you, Simon, and would be happy to hear you go on for ever." Reuchlin 1983, 357.

[44] Young, "Post-Structuralism: An Introduction," 12.

author completely dead.[45] Without him, there would be no book to interpret. The author pulled together the threads of many different discourses concerned with claims to and ways of accessing higher knowledge into an "important text" that made visible a "discursive mode different from that which prevailed" before.[46] *DAC* "marked a new domain of inquiry"[47] scholars have called the Christian Kabbalah.[48]

In Chapter Two I examine these discourses, beginning with the author's claim to knowledge – salvation. In the first few pages of the text, he claimed that "nothing admits more of the search for salvation in this world and everlasting life in the next" than Kabbalah,"[49] and that "[w]ithout it none can achieve something as elusive, as difficult, as the apprehension of the divine."[50] Second, he wrote *DAC* as part of a reformist debate seeking to revitalize the late medieval Church: from the epilogue, "I constantly build and plant the Church in various languages for the Holy Spirit, which, across the diversity of many tongues, has gathered together the peoples in one faith."[51] Third, the author was a part of a vitriolic academic and theological debate over different approaches to learning, the Scriptures, and the sources of truth. Again in the epilogue, the author stated, "I have written this for you [Pope Leo X] ... to ensure that

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[45] Barthes, "Death of the Author."

[46] Here, I follow Michel Foucault's lead in considering *DAC* a visible manifestation of a complex interaction of different discourses. Foucault 1974, 23.

[47] Hayden White, "Foucault's Discourse: The Historiography of Anti-Humanism," in *The Content of Form Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* Hayden White (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 120-21.

[48] I question this terminology. As I will discuss in my conclusion, it suggests a dependency or a field of discourse somehow inferior to its originating impulse. Although not quite as catchy, I prefer the phrase 'Christian interpretations of Kabbalah.' I will also use the spelling Cabala when referring to these Christian interpretations. I like it for two reasons, one scholarly and one not ; this is the Latin spelling of Kabbalah used by its Christian interpreters; the 'C' suggests a joining of Christian and Kabbalistic ideas into something new, something that stands alone in its own right.

[49] Reuchlin 1983, 45.

[50] Reuchlin 1983, 61.

[51] Reuchlin 1983, 359.

your memory of me be benevolent whenever my enemies strive to break or avert your paternal attitude towards me."[52] Fourth, the author participated in a discourse that attempted to synthesize apparently contradictory sources of the "wisdom of the ancients."[53] He believed that the first Kabbalah of all encapsulated "all the principles of Kabbalah, all the traditions concerning the divine, knowledge of heaven, visions of the prophets, and meditations of the blessed."[54] Fifth, he was concerned with the legality of confiscating, destroying, and burning Jewish books that apparently answered questions of salvation. His character, Simon the Kabbalist, castigated "hatred and low, disgusting envy that makes stupid fools burn books."[55] Sixth, the author's interpretation of kabbalistic acts was informed by, and a response to, a debate about the causes of unexplainable effects and efficacy of performance. He believed that just as Moses worked miracles through the names of the seventy-two angels, so too was it possible for men to enlist their help in the same way.[56] I end the chapter with a summary of the affair for which the author is most famous, and an introduction to the author himself. Although referring to the debate obliquely throughout the text, he addressed it directly at the beginning of Book Three: "For writing books which were not now to be burned, [the author] had suffered cruel persecution for more than five years, innocent, silent, but uncowed."[57]

DAC constructed its revolutionary claim to the knowledge of salvation not only across the spatial boundaries of contemporary discourse, but also across the temporal

[52] Reuchlin 1983, 357.
[53] Reuchlin 1983, 37.
[54] Reuchlin 1983, 73.
[55] Reuchlin 1983, 91.
[56] Reuchlin 1983, 261.
[57] Reuchlin 1983, 235.

boundaries of different religious and philosophic traditions. In Chapter Three, I investigate these sources. It is not my purpose to pinpoint origin and exact transmission of particular ideas within *DAC,* but to illustrate the wealth of information from which its author was able to draw. Pagan, Arabic, Jewish as well as Christian texts suggested that ritual facilitated contact with and hence knowledge of the supernatural world. The extant fragments from the *Chaldean Oracles* included an inventory of techniques that it suggested permitted the soul to ascend to the heavens while the individual was still alive.[58] The *Hermetica* presented both practical magical techniques as well as a theory of salvation or *gnōsis*.[59] Neoplatonic philosophers examined methods other than intellect in an effort to know God. Iamblicus, for example, argued that one could only achieve unity with divinity through ritual actions.[60] Aristotelian concepts of knowledge involved intellectual union of the known with the knower or God. Arabic philosophers discussed humanity's ability to cleave to the universal soul.[61] Christian theologians debated contemplative and ritual means of knowing God. Anonymous Christian medieval texts advocated the use of complex rites to achieve both earthly and heavenly knowledge. Ancient Jewish mystical texts, in their visions of ascent and descriptions of ritual, "storm[ed] heaven and force[ed]

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[58] Janowitz 2002, 8, and Sarah I. Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgic Ascent in Its Cultural Milieu," in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1997), 179.

[59] Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation, With Notes and Introduction* (Cambridge: University Press, 1992), xxxvii.

[60] Janowitz 2002, 5.

[61] Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Mysticism, and Religion, Series Editors Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Elliot Wolfson (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995), 65.

direct access to God."[62] Medieval Jewish texts suggested that man's actions could change God. I conclude Chapter Three by briefly examining the influential ideas of three men contemporary to *DAC's* author.

In Chapter Four, I explore *DAC*'s version of this higher knowledge and methodology and its similarities to theurgy, despite the author's disavowal of any magical techniques. I look at the strategies used by those advocating ritual techniques as a means of accessing higher knowledge to position their methodology on the "true" side of the binary complex. I then examine the relationship between contemplation, theurgy, Kabbalah, and the author's kabbalistic art. In Chapter Five, I conclude with an examination of this binary complex and how the kabbalistic art described in *DAC* attempted to disrupt it.

The author of *DAC* sought answers across numerous boundaries in his search for knowledge. In his creativity, he transformed the orthodox doctrine of salvation from Adam's transgression through Christ into the heterodox suggestion that one could manipulate the letters of the holy Hebrew alphabet to reach the Messiah, and from there obtain a vision of God.[63] As we begin this journey backwards across the boundary of time into an alien society, it is important to remember that when it was assumed material and immaterial beings moved between the worlds and supernatural beings were so powerful that they controlled all aspects of life both before and after death, humanity thought and acted differently.

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[62] Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, trans. Aubrey Pomerance, SUNY Series in Judaica: Hermeneutics, Myticism, and Religion (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 161.

[63] Reuchlin 1983, 115-17.

Chapter Two: The Discourses of Early Modern Europe

Salvation and Eschatology

> Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, proclaiming, "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Messiah .... Rejoice then, you heavens and those who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, for the devil has come down to you with great wrath, because he knows that his time is short."[64]

> It is granted that, among the disasters of a declining age, which we do not so much read of as experience everwhere, the old East, collapsing under the sentence of [the Devil's] irreparable ruin, has not ceased from the beginning to infect with the various plagues of heresy the church that the new East, Jesus Christ the man, made fruitful by the shedding of his blood. Nevertheless, he seeks this especially at the time when, with the world, in its evening time, declining towards the end and with the growing malice of men, he knows in his great wrath (as John declares in Revelation) that he has only a little time left.[65]

> This was the first Kabbalah of all, the announcement of primordial salvation.[66]

Early modern Europeans, especially the educated,[67] were particularly concerned about the fate of their souls for two reasons: the perception that the end of the world was near, and doubt that sacramental rites performed by a morally suspect priestly class were efficacious. The Revelation to John had warned that before the Messiah could return and God triumph, the world would experience the full destructive

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[64] Revelation 12: 10-12. I have taken biblical quotes from the New Revised Standard Version.

[65] From the 'Apologia Auctoris' prefacing the *Malleus maleficarum* written by Heinrich (Institoris) Krämer and arguably Jakob Sprenger in 1487; quoted in Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997; 2005), 326.

[66] Reuchlin 1983, 73.

[67] Cameron 1991, 12-14.

force of the Devil. It was easy to interpret the social, economic, political, and ecclesiastical crises of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as "the disasters of a declining age" and to believe, like Luther, that these were evidence of the "great cosmic showdown" between God and the Devil.[68] The Black Death had reduced the population of Europe by a third to a half, an agrarian crisis had created famine, wheat prices had declined dramatically, urbanization had accelerated, political strife and popular unrest had led to war and uprisings, the Avignon captivity and papal schism,[69] as well as its numerous political and administrative duties had weakened the moral authority of the Church.[70]

With the Day of Judgement apparently fast approaching, it was important that the path of salvation be clear and sure. While Christ through his sacrifice on the cross had made the redemption of humanity from Adam's original sin theoretically possible, the pre-Reformation Church was the only means through which to realize this salvation. Although its priests directed the action, their parishoners actively participated in the search for salvation through the performance of good works and participation in the sacraments. The outward performance of the Church's sacraments

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[68] Scribner and Dixon 2003, 15. See also Hamm, "Normative Centering in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: Observations on Religiosity, Theology, and Iconology," and Heiko A. Oberman, *Luther: Man Between God and the Devil* (Mensch zwischen Gott und Teufel), trans. Eileen Walliser-Schwarzbart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[69] Seven popes resided in Avignon, on the border of France, from 1305 to 1378 as a result of conflict between Philip IV of France and the Papacy, and political intrigue among nobles and cardinals. The move from Avignon back to Rome created a schism with, at one point, three popes claiming the papal throne.

[70] See Paul O. Kristeller, "The Role of Religion in Renaissance Humanism and Platonism," in *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion*, ed. Charles Trinkaus and Heiko A. Oberman, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, Series Editor Heiko Oberman, no. 10 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1974), Daniel Waley and Peter Denley, *Later Medieval Europe 1250-1520*, 3rd ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Ltd, 2001), and Cameron 1991.

guaranteed (*ex opera operato*) the inward reception of God's grace.[71] For example, the symbolic act of cleansing the body with water in baptism signified the cleansing of the soul from sin; the act of confessing one's sins, and atoning for them through penance meant a direct route to heaven without a detour through purgatory.[72]

Were the soteriological teachings of the Church correct? This provoked hot debate fuelled by the apparent impending end of the world. Berndt Hamm suggests that the concentration on *sola* principles,[73] such as Luther's *sola fide* and *sola Scriptura*, reflected an attempt to reduce Christendom to a set of core principles that, among other things, guaranteed a route to salvation.[74] Over and above good works and sacraments, *DAC* maintained that the active interaction of combining the words of the Scripture through the art of the Kabbalah facilitated one's ascent to God; Luther suggested it was the passive interaction of reading the words of the Scripture that prepared one to await God's grace.

Not only was the route to salvation questioned, but also the qualifications of those tending its path. Wealthy aristocrats in the priesthood were open to the charges of "worldliness, ambition, arrogance, extravagance, or ostentation." Impoverished and illiterate clerics were often unable or unwilling to properly tend to the souls of their

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[71] "Grace (gratia, Charis), in general, is a supernatural gift of God to intellectual creatures (men, angels) for their eternal salvation, whether the latter be furthered and attained through salutary acts or a state of holiness." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Grace", http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm (accessed March 14, 2007).

[72] See Scribner, "Ritual and Popular Religion in Catholic Germany at the Time of the Reformation," 478, and Cameron 1991, 79-80.

[73] "the Holy Scriptures alone, Godly law alone, faith alone, the community of the faithful with Christ alone, the redemptive act of Christ alone, the effectiveness of God's grace alone, and the honor of God alone." Hamm, "Normative Centering in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: Observations on Religiosity, Theology, and Iconology," 315-16.

[74] Hamm, "Normative Centering in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries: Observations on Religiosity, Theology, and Iconology," 316-17.

parishoners.[75] Their sale of indulgences, believed by gullible purchasers to aid the soul in reaching heaven, sparked Luther's *Ninety-Five Theses* and the Reformation. The special status of church personnel was open to abuse. For example, they were beyond the jurisdiction of criminal courts; as landowners they collected and enforced the payment of tithes; they had the freedom to trade against monopolies imposed by local civic by-laws.

The Discourse of Reform

> I constantly build and plant the Church in various languages for the Holy Spirit, which, across the diversity of many tongues, has gathered together the peoples in one faith...I hope...that you, most blessed Pope Leo...will in justice give me the peace and tranquility of mind that I deserve in recompense for the many sufferings I have endured in place of thanks for my services to the orthodox faith.[76]

The ability of a greedy or illiterate priest to effectively influence the supernatural on behalf of his parishioners,[77] or a Church seemingly pre-occupied with more worldly affairs had, along with other factors,[78] created a general desire for reform. From the eleventh century onwards there were efforts both from within and without the church to "restore it to its true essence,"[79] to look backwards to the beginnings of Christianity as inspiration for reform.

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[75] Cameron 1991, 35.

[76] From Reuchlin' prologue, addressed to Pope Leo X. Reuchlin 1983, 359.

[77] Early modern people believed that the efficacy of sacramental rites was directly related to the piousness and holiness of the cleric conducting it. Cameron 1991, 13.

[78] I have very briefly summarized reasons only directly related with the Church. There were, in addition, political and economic causes to this call for reform. See Waley and Denley 2001 and Oberman 1989, as well as Cameron 1991.

[79] Cameron 1991, 38.

The Councils of Lyons (1274), Vienne (1311-12), Constance (1414-18), Pavia-Sienna (1423-24), Basle (1431-49) and the Fourth and Fifth Lateran Councils of 1215 and 1512 discussed the content and methodology of reform. Interests vested in the status quo usually subverted any permanent resolution to abuses around such things as taxation, appointment of benefices, and life-style and privileges of the cardinals and pope. The Fourth Lateran Council laid out rules for its clergy, forbidding among other things drunkenness and non-celibate living. In response to the papal schism, the Council of Constance declared that the General Council held its powers directly from Christ and that everyone, including the Pope, was therefore "bound to obey it in matters pertaining to faith, to the extirpation of this schism and to the reform of the Church in its head and members."[80] Individual bishops attempted to supervise and improve the conduct and education of secular (non-monastic) clergy. New and splinter monastic and mendicant orders sought to imitate what they interpreted as the ascetic and disciplined lifestyle of the apostles through stricter observance of monastic rules and/or taking vows of poverty.

Lay people could not reform the political, administrative, or clerical practices of the church. However, they could examine and practice different ways of directly accessing divine grace without the requirement for priest or sacrament. Teachings by such men as Gerard Groote (1340-84) and Jean Gerson (1363-1469) underpinned a new piety labelled the *Devotio Moderna.* A main text of this new piety was the influential *De imitatione Christ (The Imitation of Christ)*, probably written by Thomas à Kempis sometime before 1441. It emphasized a simple faith in and love of Christ,

[80] Waley and Denley 2001, 120.

private prayer and meditation, preached against intellectual pride, and taught that truth could be found in the writings of the Bible and the ancients. Christ was the means to salvation. À Kempis wrote: "You have here no lasting home. You are a stranger and a pilgrim wherever you may be, and you shall have no rest until you are wholly united with Christ."[81]

Both Groote and Gerson challenged the Church's priestly and sacramental monopoly. Groote's teachings led to a lay form of communal life and ascetic piety outside the traditional avenues of monk and friar. His adherents, the Brethren of the Common Life, established communal households as well as schools throughout the Low Countries and the Rhineland. Among the many children educated at these religious schools were Nicholas of Cusa, Erasmus, and Luther. Gerson's *Montagne de Contemplation* and *De mystica theologia speculativa et practica* elaborated on the ways in which 'the ordinary person' might hope to achieve direct access to God.[82] German mysticism in the fifteenth century also tended to emphasize "the inwardness of religious experience" and "the fulfillment of human striving for perfection through divine grace and the example of Christ."[83]

While the Church accommodated some reforming impulses, it rejected others as heretical. Movements such as the Cathars, Waldensians, 'Free Spirits', Fraticelli,

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[81] Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Book Two: The Interior Life, Meditation (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1940), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/kempis/imitation.TWO.1.html>, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, (accessed March 15, 2007), no. 54. See also notes 286 and 290.

[82] Jean Gerson, *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, trans. and intro. by Brian Patrick McGuire; preface by Bernard McGinn, Classics of Western Spirituality, no. 92 (New York: Paulist Press, 1998).

[83] Lewis W. Spitz, *The Religious Renaissance of the German Humanists* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963), 8.

and specific individuals attracted varying degrees of repression.[84] Following the lead of John Wycliff (1320-1384) in England, Jon Hus (1369-1415) questioned the moral authority of a corrupt Church and stated that the real Church consisted of Christ and the elect, rather than the pope and curia.[85] Luther saw himself as primarily challenging the Church's doctrines.[86] In attacking the selling of indulgences and granting of pardons in his *Ninety-Five Theses*, he wrote: "The assurance of salvation by letters of pardon is vain, even though the commissary, nay, even though the pope himself, were to stake his soul upon it."[87]

The Discourse on the Methodology of Knowledge

> With all this activity we cheerfully flatter ourselves that we can hunt down truth with some self-evident (as they call it) demonstration, which goes from one extreme to the other (like running from starting line to winning post) using that device known as a syllogism ... This is the trap, the snare, the bait, the noose in which, in their opinion, free truth is to be captured. [88]

Not only were the practices and moral authority of the Church questioned, but also the methodology of its scholastic theologians by a new intellectual movement gaining influence among European scholars. The recovery of ancient Latin and Greek texts in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries had sparked a new approach to learning

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[84] Wycliff was condemned posthumously, Hus burned at the stake, and Luther excommunicated.

[85] Waley and Denley 2001, 125.

[86] Oberman 1989, 55.

[87] Martin Luther, *Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences (1517)*, trans. and ed. Adolph Spaeth, Reed, L. D., and Jacobs, Henry Eyster, Vol 1, pp. 29-38 (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company, 1915), <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/wittenberg/luther/web/ninetyfive.html>, Project Wittenburg, (accessed March 5, 2007), Thesis 52.

[88] Reuchlin 1983, 57.

called humanism.[89] It had begun in Italy with Petrarch (1304-1374) as the first significant writer to embrace Greek and Latin literature, but soon became a "significant force" among German intellectuals.[90] The name came from the Ciceronian phrase *studia humanitatis*. Peter Luder, a German humanist, in 1456 defined it as the study "of the books of the poets, orators and historians."[91]

While there was agreement that God was the final source of truth, and that precedent and authority mediated that truth, humanists and scholastics disputed where this truth could be found, how it should be interpreted, and whose authority was paramount.[92] Scholastics looked primarily to Aristotle and the Latin translation of the Bible[93] interpreted through the argument of medieval theologians. Their methodological tools were dialectical reasoning[94] and syllogistic[95] logic. For

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[89] The number of ancient texts available to the intellectual community had increased substantially, beginning in the twelfth century, and had resulted in the integration of Aristotle into Christian thought. The only works of Aristotle known in Latin Christendom after the fall of the Roman Empire were Boethius' translations of the elementary treatises. More works were preserved in Byzantine manuscripts. Western Christians recovered these texts, as well as Muslim commentaries and other Muslim and Jewish philosophical works, through contact with the Arab world. This continued in the fifteenth century with the discovery and translation of texts from different Greek philosophical schools whose differences were often unrecognized or blurred. See Brian Tierney and Sidney Painter, *Western Europe in the Middle Ages 300-1475*, 6th ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill College, 1999), 411, and Brian P. Copenhaver and Charles B. Schmitt, *Renaissance Philosophy*, A History of Western Philosophy, Series Editors Walter Bodmer et al., no. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 1-51.

[90] In his introduction, Spitz outlines the scholarly controversy surrounding the development of Northern humanism: first, that it was an outgrowth of Italian Renaissance influences; second, that it had primarily German roots such as the *Devotio Moderna*. While favouring the Southern theory, Spitz acknowledges a subtle fusion between the two. Spitz 1963, 2, 268.

[91] Spitz 1963, 4.

[92] Kristeller warns of the dangers of generalizations: "The humanists were not only moralists but also grammarians and rhetoricians, poets and writers, translators and copyists; historians and classical scholars .... The humanist profession as a whole was a scholarly and literary profession, and those members of the profession who were interested in philosophy combined philosophy with scholarship and literature, as at other times philosophy may have been combined with theology or with the sciences." Kristeller, "The Role of Religion in Renaissance Humanism and Platonism," 369.

[93] The Vulgate.

[94] "The art of critical examination into the truth of an opinion; the investigation of truth by discussion: in earlier English use, a synonym of logic as applied to formal rhetorical reasoning; logical

humanists, truth rested closer to the beginnings of Christianity. Their slogan *ad fontes* referred not just to the works of Aristotle but also to all the newly discovered or translated ancient Greek, Latin, Arabic, and Hebrew authors. Correct understanding of these works depended upon correct translation. Humanists with their knowledge of the ancient languages and training in philology, which emphasized grammatical rules, etymology, and classical usage, felt themselves better suited to interpret the wisdom encapsulated in these texts. The author of *DAC* used his ability in Hebrew to unearth what he believed to be the wisdom of salvation within kabbalistic texts.

Erika Rummel delineates three phases in the conflict between scholastics and humanists.[96] The first phase began in fifteenth-century Italy with a debate over the more superficial distinction of rhetoric and form against philosophy and content. A gradual shift in tone during the last half of the century, and location in the early sixteenth century, marked the second phase. Humanists began to use their philological skills to challenge scholastic theologians on their interpretation of sacred texts. Rather than a debate over style and language, it became a debate over who had the right and ability to interpret and understand the Word of God. In the universities of Northern

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argumentation or disputation." *Oxford English Dictionary Online,* 2d ed., s.v, "dialectic", http://dictionary.oed.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ (accessed March 5, 2007).

[95] "An argument expressed or claimed to be expressible in the form of two propositions called the premises, containing a common or middle term, with a third proposition called the conclusion, resulting necessarily from the other two." *Oxford English Dictionary Online,* 2d ed., s.v, "syllogism", http://dictionary.oed.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/ (accessed March 5, 2007).

[96] Unless otherwise noted, this summary is taken from Erika Rummel, "*Et cum theologo bella poeta gerit:* The Conflict between Humanists and Scholastics Revisited," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* XXIII, no. 4 (1992). She offers a more nuanced interpretation of the debate, suggesting that the traditional view of intense conflict between the two sides was more appropriate to the later phases and the revisionist view, seeing the conflict as greatly exaggerated, to the earlier. See also John F. D'Amico, "Humanism and Pre-Reformation Theology," in *Renaissance Humanism Foundations, Forms and Legacy:* ed. Albert Jr. Rabil, vol. 3, Humanism and the Disciplines (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), and Spitz 1963.

Germany, unlike those in the south, there were well established theological faculties who saw the humanist challenge not only as one of authority but also of professional competence and academic qualification. Scholastics questioned the competence of humanists whose expertise was in the intricacies of language rather than theological argument. Humanists argued that interpretation of Scripture depended on skill and training rather than theological credentials, Church authorization, or divine inspiration.[97] Polite conversation became vicious attack. Humanists faulted scholastics for "their addiction to Aristotle, for their barbarous Latin, and for obscurantism,"[98] and used derogatory terms such as barbarian, thickheads, and quibblers. The author of *DAC*, for example, referred to Dominican scholastics as "scavenging magpies with a blackish tail dangling from their shoulders, hypocrites who simulate and dissimulate in everything."[99] Scholastics dubbed humanists "grammarians, speechifiers, Greeklings" and "purveyors of corrupt pagan morality."[100]

The Reformation subsumed the last stage of the scholastic/humanist debate. The discourse of methodology moved into the discourse of reform. Stereotypes shifted from humanist "poets and grammarians" and scholastic "barbarians and quibblers" to "Lutherans" and "reactionary papists."[101] The Louvain theologian Frans Titelmans linked humanists with heretics: "Most of them, in our experience, have become worse men, prone to ... rebellion against leaders of the church and their own order, prone to

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[97] Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate in the Renaissance & Reformation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 84.

[98] Rummel 1995, 2

[99] Reuchlin 1983, 223.

[100] Rummel 1995, 11, 15.

[101] Rummel, "*Et cum theologo bella poeta gerit:* The Conflict between Humanists and Scholastics Revisited," 723.

vain ambition, to the dissemination of errors, and other such things." Franz Burchard, a student of Luther's lieutenant, Melanchthon, suggested that because scholastics could not understand the original text and context of the Scriptures "they have spread in the church many impious and pernicious opinions" and were "clowns at a feast."[102]

Erasmus was a good example of the way in which Church reform and humanist methodology were intertwined. Cameron in his discussion of the Northern Renaissance and the Church summarizes this well. He writes: "[Erasmus] envisioned a restoration (*restitutio*) of Christianity in parallel to the 'rebirth" (*renascentia*) of literature."[103] His *philosophia Christi* emphasized an understanding through humanist methods of the teachings of Christ as the basis for a moral life. By contrast, he held up as targets in his writings the degeneracy of society and clergy, the secular faults of popes, the religious practices of the Church, and the scholastic methodology of its theologians. In his popular satire, *Praise of Folly*, Erasmus wrote:

> [The Apostles] baptized far and near, and yet taught nowhere what was the formal, material, efficient, and final cause of baptism, nor made the least mention of delible and indelible characters. They worshiped, 'tis true, but in spirit, following herein no other than that of the Gospel, "God is a Spirit, and they that worship, must worship him in spirit and truth;" yet it does not appear it was at that time revealed to them that an image sketched on the wall with a coal was to be worshiped with the same worship as Christ Himself, if at least the two forefingers be stretched out, the hair long and uncut, and have three rays about the crown of the head. For who can conceive these things, unless he has spent at least six and thirty years in the philosophical and supercelestial whims of Aristotle and the Schoolmen?[104]

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[102] Both quoted in Rummel, "*Et cum theologo bella poeta gerit:* The Conflict between Humanists and Scholastics Revisited," 724.

[103] Cameron 1991, 64.

[104] Desiderius Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, trans. John Wilson, <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/9371>, Project Gutenberg, (accessed March 15, 2007).

The Discourse of Unity

> The greatest of all our masters, Pythagoras, began his study of knowledge outside Greece, with a man called Zora. At that time in Egypt the people then known as prophets, practiced philosophy with him as did the Chaldees of Assyria, the Druids in Gaul, the Shamans of Bactria, a number of Celts, the Magi in Persia, the Gymnosophists; then he studied with Anacharsis of Scythia, and with Zamolxis, who had been Pythagoras' slave, in Thrace ....
>
> Lastly he also studied philosophy with the Jews in India, called Brahman.[105]

Early modern intellectuals, concerned with apparent contradictions among differents books of ancient wisdom and the teachings of the Church, attempted to reconcile such disparate systems of knowledge. Belief in a "single unifying truth" first given by God to the ancients fuelled a discourse of unity.[106] In attempting to assimilate newly available pagan texts into the corpus of Christian theology, their purpose was not to sift true from false. Instead it was to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable, to find the kernel of wisdom transmitted through the centuries that would permit synthesis rather than exclusion.[107]

Nicholas Cardinal of Cusa (1401-1464) was representative of such an endeavour. Variously described as scholastic, churchman, humanist, reformer, professor, philosopher, mystic, papal diplomat, fledgling scientist, and mathematician, he exemplified in his person what he sought in his work – unity. His submission to the Council of Basel, an effort to resolve the dispute about where supreme ecclesiastical authority lay, was entitled *De concordantia catholica*. He worked to reconcile both the

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[105] Reuchlin 1983, 129.

[106] Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992, 1.

[107] Charles Schmitt points out that this was not exclusive to European early modern thinkers. He mentions, among others, Iamblichus, Augustine, Psellus, and Pletho. Charles B. Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27, no. 4 (1966).

Hussite heretics of Bohemia and the Greek Orthodox Church with the Roman Church. His guiding principle was *coincidentia oppositorum*; all opposites or apparent contradictions could be resolved in the unity of God. Just as all things were present in God, God was present in all things. However, one could reach this understanding of God only through an openness of spirit rather than reason, with the assistance of Christ.[108] Cusanus' approach to knowledge also reflected his emphasis on unity. He wrote in *De pace fidei*: "There can be only one wisdom. For if it were possible for there to be more than one wisdom, then these several would have to exist from one wisdom; for prior to all plurality there is unity."[109] Accordingly, his work represented a synthesis of ideas derived from Pseudo-Dionysius,[110] the Neoplatonic philosophers, and the German mystic Meister Eckhardt among other thinkers.

Cusanus was not the only intellectual to take such a creative approach to ancient thinkers. More ambitious than the works of Cusanus were the syncretic efforts of Marsilio Ficino (1433-99), and Pico della Mirandola (1463-94). Ficino translated not only Platonic and Neoplatonic works, but also in 1462 the fourteen treatises within the *Corpus Hermeticum.* In his preface to a *Book on the Power and Wisdom of God, Whose Title is Pimander*, he wrote: "In this way, from a wondrous line of six theologians emerged a single system of ancient theology, harmonious in every part, which traced its origins to Mercurius [Hermes Trismegistus] and reached absolute

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[108] See Spitz 1963, 9-12, D'Amico, "Humanism and Pre-Reformation Theology,", 368, Copenhaver and Schmitt 1992, 176-84, and Robert S. J. Joda, "Nicholas of Cusa: Precursor of Humanism," in *The Renaissance and Reformation in Germany: An Introduction*, ed. Gerhart Hoffmeister (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1977).

[109] Quoted in Jasper Hopkins, *A Concise Introduction to the Philosophy of Nicholas of Cusa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1978), 8.

[110] See note 282

perfection with the divine Plato."[111] This was the basis for Ficino's synthesis of Greek philosophic works (Plato, Plotinus, Iamblichus) and the *Hermeticum* and *Chaldean Oracles* with early Christian thinkers such as Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysus, and later Aristotelian scholastic theologians such as Thomas Aquinas. As with most scholars of his time, he accepted most ancient texts as true and hence looked for a unitary wisdom, which he perceived God as gradually revealing through different sources.[112] For instance, he discerned the Christian Trinity, angels, the Virgin Mary and the saints in the Neoplatonic three hypostases of the One, the Mind, and the World Soul, the supercelestial gods, the celestial gods, their semi-divine heroes and daemons.[113]

Perhaps the most audacious attempt to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable was that of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola. In 1486 he posted his *Nine Hundred Theses* in Rome with a challenge for debate to all-comers.[114] In the first four hundred theses he offered what he considered to be the key concepts of thinkers from the Latin Scholastics back through the Arabs, Greek Peripatetics, Platonists, Pythagoreans, Chaldeans, and Egyptians to the Hebrew Kabbalists. He began the last five hundred

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[111] Copenhaver 1992, xlviii.

[112] Christopher Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism," in *Marsilio Ficinio His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy*, ed. M. J. B. Allen and V. R. Rees (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 85.

[113] Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, "Introduction," in Marsilio Ficino *Three Books on Life: A Critical Edition and Translation With Introduction and Notes*, Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, trans., Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, no. 57 (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1989), 39.

[114] In his preface he wrote: "The following nine hundred Dialectical, Moral, Physical, Mathematical, Metaphysical, Theological, Magical, and Cabalistic opinions, including his own and those of the wise Chaldeans, Arabs, Hebrew, Greeks, Egyptians, and Latins, will be disputed publically by Giovanni Pico of Mirandola, the Count of Concord .... The doctrines to be debated are proposed separately by nations and their sect [*gentes*] leaders, but in common in respect to the parts of philosophy – as though in a medley, everything mixed together." S. A. Farmer, *Syncretism in the West: Pico's 900 Theses (1486). The Evolution of Traditional Religious and Philosophical Systems*, Temple & Renaissance Texts & Studies, no. 167 (Temple, Arizona: Arizona State University, 1998), 211.

with the explanation, "seventeen paradoxical conclusions according to my own opinion, first reconciling the words of Aristotle and Plato, then those of other learned men who seem to disagree."[115]

"In order to understand any human activity, humanists were inclined to seek its genesis, and because they admired the ancients so intensely and imitated them so zealously, they were also inclined to identify the older with the better."[116] Both Ficino and Pico constructed a theological genealogy of wisdom, the *prisca theologia,*[117] from the ancient past to their Christian present. Whereas Ficino believed the first of the line of *prisci theologii* was Hermes Trismegistus, Pico traced its origins to Moses and included at the beginning of his genealogy the Hebrew Cabalist wise men. Both men considered the pinnacle of this genealogy to be Christianity.

The Discourse of Magic

> From the foregoing I infer that the magic arts which involve invocations of demons and pacts with them are justly prohibited by every form of law as evil and subversive of all polity. The opposing argument to this was upheld by that man of distinguished intelligence, the master and lord who has just (or, very recently) taken his Vespers, saying in similar case that the study of the magic arts promotes the salvation of the faithful.[118]

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[115] Farmer 1998, 365.

[116] Brian P. Copenhaver, "Natural Magic, Hermeticism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science," in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Robert S. Westman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 269.

[117] For an interesting discussion of the *philosophia perennis,* which grew out of the tradition of the *prisca theologia* see Schmitt, "Perennial Philosophy: From Agostino Steuco to Leibniz." Schmitt suggests that the term probably originated from *De perenni philosophia*, written by Italian Augustinian Agostino Steuco (1497-1548), and that Steuco's most direct predecessors were Ficino and Pico. Schmitt defines perennial philosophy as a truth that "is considered to persist from generation to generation, long after ephemeral philosophical fads and fashions" have disappeared (505). Aldous Huxley picked up the name in his 1945 book, *The Perennial Philosophy.*

[118] A portion of an argument made by Bernard Basin, Canon of Saragossa, before the rector and the University of Paris in 1482. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science: During*

> Day and night men set nets and traps to catch one by one the causes of each thing: the material, formal, efficient, and final causes.[119]

The discourse of magic was the discourse of causality and efficacy. It attempted to categorize effects according to supernatural, preternatural, or natural causes, and according to whether they were real or illusory. Only God and his appointed agents were able to cause real supernatural effects or *miracula* – phenomena that broke God's laws of nature. Observable natural properties caused real natural effects – phenomena that obeyed these laws. These two categories appeared to be clear cut. The debate was over the cause of preternatural effects – phenomena that appeared to be real but for which there was no obvious explanation. These included the marvellous wonders catalogued by Pliny and Isidore,[120] as well as the spells, charms, exorcisms, and soothsaying performed by various types of magical practitioners.[121] They were clearly not miracles and because, by definition, everything else had to operate within the boundary of the natural world, only hidden properties could explain *mira*.

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the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era, vol. 4 (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1934), 488-9.

[119] Reuchlin 1983, 55.

[120] Pliny in Book 32 of his *Natural History* described "the electric ray and the shipholder" as illustrations of natural objects possessing occult powers. Ficino wrote in *De vita*: "The marine torpedo also suddenly benumbs the hand that touches it, even at a distance through a rod, and by contact alone the little echinus fish is said to retard a great ship"; quoted in Copenhaver, "Natural Magic, Hermeticism, and Occultism in Early Modern Science," 275.

[121] As both Valerie Flint and Keith Thomas have so aptly pointed out, priests were only one among many categories of magical practitioners in medieval and early modern Europe. Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), and Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971).

This was the realm of magic, the attempt to understand and perhaps manipulate the occult properties of nature in order to deliberately create such effects,[122] but by whom, for what purpose, and how? Did only the Devil or magicians associated with him have the knowledge to manipulate these occult properties; or were magicians able to work through their own will or the will of God rather than drawing on the power of the Devil? Could magic achieve spiritual as well as material goals? Did certain words and actions produce real effects? If so, what was efficacious and what was not? If not, were they merely illusions preying on the gullibility of the superstitious mind?

Opinions and argument ranged along the continuum between the two poles of early modern magic: natural and demonic.[123] The defenders of *magia naturalis* suggested a number of causes, from terrestrial, stellar, and planetary influences at lower levels, to angels and ultimately God in its highest aspirations. This was magician as healer, doctor, and ultimately priest. Pico argued that "[v]oices and words [had] efficacy in a magical work, because in that work in which nature first exercises magic, the voice [was] God's."[124] Ficino wrote that natural magic assumed "its benefits from natural investigations into the propitious disposition of the heavenly bodies."[125] At the other end of the spectrum, demonic magic, as its name

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[122] This is a paraphrase of Stuart Clark's definition: "For in early modern Europe, as in the normal science of the preceding period, 'magic' was the term given to the study and manipulation of many of those phenomena ..." Clark 1997 , 214.

[123] See Chapters 14 on Natural Magic, and 15 on Demonic Magic in Clark 1997.

[124] Thesis 9:19 in Farmer's numbering scheme. Farmer 1998, 501. This was one of Pico's twenty-six magical conclusions according to his own opinion.

[125] From the *Apologia in qua de medicina, astrologia, vita mundi, item de magic qui Christum statim natum salutaverunt agitu* quoted in Noel L. Brann, *Trithemius and Magical Theology: A Chapter*

implied, was thought to draw its power from the Devil and his minions; efficacy was directly attributable to the Devil and all else was superstition. This was magician as sorcerer. Bishop Pedro Garsias[126] in his *Determinationes magistrales contra conclusions Joannis Pici* written in 1489, argued that if there were any power in words and numbers it came from evil spirits, not God. [127] The Benedictine abbot and scholar, Johannes Trithemius (1462-1516), [128] contrasted one type of magic that "teaches how to produce marvellous effects through the mediation of powers residing in nature" against another "which, by virtue of calling on evil spirits for assistance, is condemned by the Church."[129]

Although I have very briefly summarized this discourse, it engaged the intellectual and theological elite across early modern Europe, fuelling university debates and theses, sermons and demonological treatises.[130]

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in the Controversy Over Occult Studies in Early Modern Europe, SUNY Series in Western Esoteric Traditions, Series Editor David Applebaum (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 27.

[126] Garsias was a member of the commission appointed by Pope Innocent VIII, which condemned thirteen of Pico's theses as heretical. In response, Pico wrote his *Apologia*, which was not an apology at all but rather a defense. The Pope then declared all his Theses heretical. Pico fled to and was arrested in France. Only through the intervention of his patron, Lorenzo de Medici, was he allowed to move to Florence. However, it was not until 1493 that Pope Alexander VI completely exonerated him.

[127] Charles Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtald Institutes* 39 (1976): 126.

[128] Cabalist Trithemius became Abbot of Sponheim monastery at the age of 22. In 1506 he was forced to leave Sponheim and became the Abbot of the monastery of St. Jacob in Würzburg. See Paola. Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance: From Ficino and Della Porta to Trithemius, Agrippa, Bruno* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

[129] Quoted in Brann 1999, 245.

[130] See also Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science: During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*, vol. 1 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), 485-528, Stuart Clark, "The Scientific Status of Demonology," in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) and Stuart Clark, "The Rational Witchfinder: Conscience, Demonological Naturalism and Popular Superstitions," in *Science, Culture, and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe*, ed. Stephen Pumfrey, Paolo L. Rossi, and Maurice Slawinski (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

The Discourse of Anti-Judaism: The Reuchlin Affair

> On the previous day there arrived in Frankfurt the judgement of the Roman curia that the trumped up ban imposed on Johann Reuchlin by Astarotus should be lifted. For writing books which were not now to be burned, Reuchlin had suffered cruel persecution for more than five years, innocent, silent, but uncowed.[131]
>
> All the Jewish traditions and discoveries have been popularized by non-Jewish plagiarists, first in Greek and then in Latin; there is nothing in our philosophy that was not first developed by the Jews, although by this time they do not get the recognition they deserve and everyone now despises Jews and anything associated with them.[132]

It is time to introduce the author of *De arte cabalistica*. Johannes Reuchlin was born in Pforzheim on January 29, 1455, and died at Bad Liebenzell outside of Stuttgart June 30, 1522. He studied the liberal arts at Freiburg, Basel, and Paris, and Roman law at Orléans, Poitiers, and Tübingen, receiving a BA in 1475 and MA in 1477 in the liberal arts, his licentiate in 1481, and his doctorate in imperial law in 1484/5. His employment as diplomat with Count Eberhard (the Elder) of Würtemberg and Philip Elector Palatine took him to Rome, Florence, and the imperial court at Ling. His illustrious career in law included the positions of court judge for the Count, licentiate and assessor of the supreme court in Stuttgart, proctor of the order of Dominicans for Germany for twenty-nine years, and legal counsel to the Swabian league for eleven years, jurist in Stuttgart, and member of the secular supreme court of Speyer.

It appears, however, that diplomacy and law were only distractions from his passion – the search for and dissemination of the truth "hidden ... in books and

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[131] Reuchlin 1983, 235.
[132] Reuchlin 1983, 131.

memorials of past times."[133] He believed that one could restore the "wisdom of the ancients" to the light of day through the knowledge of the languages in which these texts, particularly the Old and New Testament, were written.[134] Spitz writes that "his study of Hebrew was almost as much a religious exercise as a scholarly preoccupation."[135] In the preface to his *De rudimentis hebraicis* (1506), the first reasonable grammar manual written by a Christian scholar,[136] he wrote, "Though I admire Jerome as an angel and highly esteem Lyra[137] as a master, I bow before the truth as before God."[138] He also dedicated his second book on Hebrew grammar, *De accentibus et orthographia linguae hebraicae* (1518), "to God and pious learning."[139]

He sought to guide others in the pursuit of this truth. He taught and wrote all his life. He taught formally at Basel, Poitiers, Orléans, and as a professor at Ingolstadt and Tübingen, and informally at Heidelberg[140] and in his home in Stuttgart. He began teaching Latin, moved to Greek and then in his late thirties began to seriously study and then informally teach Hebrew.[141] He learned Hebrew from two illustrious Jews:

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[133] Reuchlin 1983, 37.

[134] Reuchlin 1983, 37.

[135] Lewis W. Spitz, "Reuchlin's Philosophy: Pythagoras and Cabala for Christ," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 47 (1956): 3.

[136] Spitz, "Reuchlin's Philosophy: Pythagoras and Cabala for Christ," 2.

[137] Franciscan scholar Nicholas de Lyra (d.1340) had learned Hebrew and studied commentaries of Jewish scholars. He questioned the accuracy of the Vulgate due to copyist errors, and felt it should be restored by comparison with Hebrew codices. Spitz 1963, 66.

[138] Heiko A. Oberman, "Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes to Judaism: Reuchlin, Erasmus and Luther," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983), 334.

[139] Spitz 1963, 63.

[140] Eberhard was succeeded by his nephew Eberhard the Younger in 1496, against whom Reuchlin had worked. On the advice of friends he left Stuttgart for Heidelberg where he was welcomed. He returned to Stuttgart when Eberhard the Younger was unseated in 1499.

[141] Rummel notes that university lectureships in Hebrew were only established in the 1520's and that "[i]n Reuchlin's time it took considerable initiative to acquire a knowledge of Hebrew." Erika Rummel, *The Case Against Johann Reuchlin: Religious and Social Controversy in Sixteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 15.

Jacob ben Jehiel Loans, court physician to Emperor Frederick III, who he admired and with whom he remained in contact throughout his life, and Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno, philosopher and personal physician to Cardinal Domenico Grimani. He possessed thirteen Hebrew manuscripts and at least eight Hebrew books.[142] Besides his cabalistic works (*De verbo mirificio* and *DAC*) and Hebrew grammars, he published an edition of the Seven Penitential Psalms with the Hebrew text, Latin translation and grammatical explanation, a Latin dictionary *Vocabularis breviloquus* at age twenty, composed a Greek grammar in 1479, translated a number of Greek writings, wrote two satirical comedies in Latin, and a handbook on the proper use of rhetoric in sermons.

Emperors, popes, priests, friends, and foes alike admired and respected Reuchlin for his linguistic abilities. Humanists venerated him as one of the early pioneers of philological studies and new approaches to literature and philosophy. He was the first scholar to bear the triple linguistic tiara of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.[143] He impressed papal ambassadors at the court of Eberhard the Elder and the papal court in Rome with his fluency and eloquence in Latin. On his third trip to Rome in 1498, upon hearing his grasp of Greek, a Greek lecturer supposedly commented that "[o]ur persecuted Greece has fled over the Alps to Germany."[144] Emperor Frederick III raised him to the rank of nobility with the hereditary title of Count Palatine during his stay at the imperial court in 1492. In a letter of support written to Reuchlin in 1518, Luther commented that "[t]he beginning of a better knowledge could be made only through a

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[142] Spitz 1963, 62.
[143] Spitz 1963, 62.
[144] Francis Barham, *The Life and Times of John Reuchlin or Capnion, The Father of the German Reformation* (London: Whittaker and Co., 1843), 62, and Spitz, "Reuchlin's Philosophy: Pythagoras and Cabala for Christ," 1.

man of great gifts."[145] Erasmus in his *Apotheosis Capnionis*,[146] written just after Reuchlin's death, called him a blessed hero for renewing to mankind the gift of tongues, and portrayed St. Jerome accompanying him into heaven.[147] It was a measure of this respect that he was able to withstand charges of Judaizing, reputation intact, in a virulently anti-Judaic culture.[148]

In medieval and early modern Christian society, Jews were a "separate breed capable of the grossest immoralities, the deepest hatreds and the blackest crimes."[149] Attempts to restrict social contact between Jews and Christians included visible identification of Jews with special clothing or badges, curfews on certain Christian holidays, and refusal to allow Jewish membership in town guilds.[150] Misunderstanding, hatred, and fear fuelled book-burnings, riots, expulsions, and superstition. The most

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[145] Ludwig Geiger, ed., *Johann Reuchlins Briefwechsel* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms , 1962), 311; quoted in Spitz 1963, 76.

[146] Ermolao Barbaro, Italian Renaissance scholar, gave Reuchlin the Greek name Capnion meaning 'small smoke'. This play on words comes from the fact that smoke in German is Rauch and –lin is a diminutive suffix, hence rauch –lin! Like *DAC*, Reuchlin wrote *De verbo mirifico* as a conversation between three characters. The teacher in this book was the Christian whom Reuchlin called Capnion (after himself). The name also appeared in a coat of arms at the beginning of *DAC*, and on his gravestone.

[147] Desiderius Erasmus, *Twenty-Two Select Colloquies out of Erasmus Roterodamus Pleasantly Representing Several Superstitious Levities that were Crept into the Church of Rome in his Days*, (1689), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com.>, Early English Books Online, (accessed March 17, 2007), The Apotheosis of Capnio, or The Franciscan's Vision. See also Oberman, "Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes to Judaism: Reuchlin, Erasmus and Luther," 340.

[148] Information for this brief biography comes from sources already noted, as well as Roland H. Bainton, "Introduction," in *German Humanism and Reformation*, ed. Reinhard P. Becker and Roland H. Bainton, The German Library Volkmar Sander (New York: Continuum, 1982) and Jerome Friedman, *The Most Ancient Testimony: Sixteenth-Century Christian-Hebraica in the Age of Renaissance Nostalgia* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1983).The definitive biography remains Ludwig Geiger, *Johann Reuchlin: Sein Leben Und Seine Werke* (Nieuwkoop: B. De Graaf, 1964). Other important sources are Geiger 1962 and F. Secret, *Les Kabbalistes Chrétiens De La Renaissance* (Paris: Dunod, 1964).

[149] James H. Overfield, "A New Look at the Reuchlin Affair," *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* VIII (1971): 172. See also Robert Bonfil, "Aliens Within: The Jews and Antijudaism," in *Handbook of European History 1400-1600: Late Middle Ages, Renaissance and Reformation*, ed. Thomas A. J. Brady, Heiko A. Oberman, and James D. Tracy, vol. 1: *Structures and Assertions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994).

[150] Rummel 2002, 5-6.

prevalent superstitions were Jewish desecration of the consecrated Host, and the assumption that Jews used the blood of murdered Christian children in their supposed magical rites.

R. Po-Chia Hsia documents the increase of ritual murder accusations from the middle of the fifteenth century in the Holy Roman Empire by focusing on three trials that took place in Southern Germany between 1470 and 1504.[151] He uses these trials to trace the links made in the minds of Christian Europeans between heretics, magicians, and Jews. The medieval Christian church had drawn on the Jews' ancient reputation as magical practitioners selling talismans and amulets, telling fortunes, and effecting cures, to encourage the construct of Jew as evil sorcerer practicing ritual murder at the behest of the Devil. It wasn't too surprising then, that such magic was thought to require the potency of Christian blood and the Christian Host.[152]

The most pertinent question in this anti-Judaic discourse was how to deal effectively with the perceived enemy: through expulsion, or conversion by force or persuasion. Both Reuchlin and initially[153] the Jewish apostate Johannes Pfefferkorn favoured conversion. In 1505 Reuchlin published a letter to an unnamed nobleman in which he argued that the only way to save the Jews from their sin of killing Christ was

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[151] R. Hsia Po-chia, *The Myth of Ritual Murder: Jews and Magic in Reformation Germany* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988). I draw the reader's attention to the proximity of these trials, both spatially and temporally, to Reuchlin: Endingen (1470) and Freiburg(1504) in the south west corner below Pforzheim and Stuttgart, and Regensburg(1476) north east of Stuttgart close to Ingolstadt.

[152] Po-chia provides an excellent summary of this argument in his Introduction. Hsia Po-chia 1988, 5-12.

[153] In subsequent pamphlets, Pfefferkorn became more strident in recommending expulsion.

through conversion.[154] However he felt persuasion would be more effective than force. In 1507, Pfefferkorn published the *Judenspiegel*, which exhorted Jews to accept Christ as the Messiah, and provided advice on how to facilitate such a conversion, including the confiscation of all Hebrew books except the Scriptures.

Through the influence of Kunnigund, Archduchess of Austria, on her brother Emperor Maximilian I, Pfefferkorn obtained an imperial mandate to carry out his recommendation to confiscate any Jewish books that Pfefferkorn "found offensive to the Christian faith."[155] He sought Reuchlin's advice on how to implement the mandate, but the two disagreed over its wording.[156] Subsequently, the Emperor temporarily halted the confiscation, which had been protested by the Archbishop Uriel von Gemmingen of Mainz and Jewish representatives in whose territory Pfefferkorn had begun his work, and ordered the Archbishop to institute a committee to determine whether the confiscation should be continued.

This committee requested recommendations from four universities and three individuals.[157] Reuchin's *Gutachten* was the only recommendation portraying Jewish literature and learning in a positive light, and opposing total confiscation and destruction, for which the committee castigated him. As a jurist, he defended the right of Jews as subjects of the Holy Roman Empire to protection under Imperial Law. This

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[154] The *Tütsch Missive* or German Missal: Oberman, "Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes to Judaism: Reuchlin, Erasmus and Luther," 332-3, and Hsia Po-chia 1988, 119.

[155] Ulrich v. Hutten, *Ulrichi Huteni Equitis Operum Supplementum*, ed. E. Böcking (Leipzig: 1864), I: 89; quoted in Rummel 2002, 43, note 31.

[156] The two even disputed the outcome of their one and only meeting, with Reuchlin reporting it as a strong disagreement, and Pfefferkorn describing it as amicable. Hsia Po-chia 1988, 123, note 48.

[157] The theological faculties at the Universities of Mainz, Erfurt, Cologne and Heidelberg, and Reuchlin, Jacob Hoogstraten, a Dominican member of the theological faculty at Cologne and the German Inquisitor of Heretical Pravity, and Victor von Karben an apostate and priest.

law protected the right of all citizens to hold private property without fear of confiscation by force, and the right of Jews to maintain their synagogues "in peace, without bother or interference."[158] According to Reuchlin's interpretation of the law, books could legally "be suppressed, confiscated and burned" only if they were condemned and banned, and then only "following a thorough inquest and a legally conducted trial." [159] He then argued that Jewish books had not been condemned nor banned, and that only a very few (only two that he had read[160]) would warrant such treatment.

He itemized Jewish books into various categories[161] and illustrated why each category, and especially the Talmud, would not warrant such treatment. In his defence of the Talmud he noted: "we know for a fact that the sages of old hid their most profound knowledge and wisdom behind the guise of nonsense, dissembled words or allegorical signs; that often enough, they not only made their words incomprehensible but even went so far as to alter the letters."[162] He defended kabbalistic texts containing

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[158] Johannes Reuchlin, *Recommendation Whether to Confiscate, Destroy and Burn All Jewish Books: A Classic Treatise Against Anti-Semitism* (Gutachten über das Jüdische schrifttum), trans. and ed. Peter Wortsman, Studies in Judaism and Christianity: Exploration of Issues in the Contemporary Dialogue between Christians and Jews, Editor-in-Chief Helga Croner (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 33.

[159] Reuchlin 2000, 36.

[160] "[T]he one is called *Nizzachon*, the other *Tolduth Jeschu ha-nozri*, the latter of which, moreover, is even considered by the Jews themselves as apocrypha, as Paul von Burgos [an apostate appointed Bishop of Burgos in 1415] writes in chapter six of the second half of his 'Scrutinium Scripturarum.' Indeed, I also remember hearing repeatedly in the course of many conversations with Jews at the court of Emperor Frederick III, of blessed memory, the father of our most blessed Lord, that the Jews themselves saw to it that such books were taken and destroyed and that it was forbidden for their own people ever to express anything of the sort aloud or in print." Reuchlin 2000, 34-5.

[161] The twenty-four books of the Hebrew Scripture, the Talmud, Kabbalist texts, glosses and commentaries called *Perush*, sermons and disputations called Midrash, works of philosophers and scholars of all disciplines called *Sefarim*, and poetry, fables, verse, fairy tales, satires and collections of moral examplae. Reuchlin 2000, 34-5.

[162] Reuchlin 2000, 57.

the "sublime mystery of the pronouncements and words of God"[163] using the authority of the Papacy. He wrote that Pope Innocent VIII ordered the books of the Kabbalah "to be studied and appraised by many very learned bishops and professors," Pope Sixtus IV ordered these texts to "be translated into Latin for the benefit of us Christians," and Pope Alexander VI concluded that Mirandola "did rightfully study the books of the Kabbalah" and hence approved the Count's *Apologia.* Reuchlin noted Mirandola's conclusion that the kabbalistic books, of which Pico della Mirandola stated there were seventy, contained the wisdom of Moses, and substantiated the truth of Christianity. Reuchlin drew an analogy between these books and the "70 books inspired by God, not intended to be understood by every man" mentioned in the apocryphal third book of Ezra.[164]

The following sums up the crux of his defence of Jewish books:

> In sum, it seems to me to be neither praiseworthy to God, nor useful to our Holy Christian Faith, nor conducive to the growth of Godly worship to forcibly seize, suppress or burn the Jews' books – with the exception of slanderous works, which we may designate as *libelli famosi*, and books of the "forbidden arts," which are injurious to all men and, therefore, not to be tolerated, as I have already explained above. For the Jews are, in a certain sense, our Capsarii, cataloguers and librarians, who preserve for us those books from which we may derive proof of our Christian Faith, as the Church Father St. Thomas says in his Summa.[165]

Maximilian, perhaps persuaded by the lobbying of Jewish leaders as well as Reuchlin's argument, did not follow the majority recommendation. And with that, the disagreement over how German Jews should be treated escalated into the infamous dispute known as the Reuchlin Affair. It escalated on two fronts – legal and literary.

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[163] Reuchlin 2000, 64.
[164] Reuchlin 2000, 66.
[165] Reuchlin 2000, 70.

Pfefferkorn continued his case for confiscation and against Reuchlin in a series of polemical tracts beginning with the *Handspiegel* published in 1511. He sent Reuchlin's response, the *Augenspiegel* containing a version of Reuchlin's 1510 Commission opinion, to the Cologne theologians who, along with the faculties of Louvain, Mainz, Erfurt, and Paris, condemned it as heretical[166] for its "Judaizing" content. Maximilian banned it in 1512. Hoogstraten attempted to try the book and the man in front of his Inquisitional Court in 1513, but the Archbishop of Mainz halted the trial, and Pope Leo X handed the matter over to the court of the Bishop of Speyer. Unwilling to accept Reuchlin's acquittal by this court, the Cologne Dominicans burned the *Augenspiegel* in public as heretical, and Hoogstraten and the Cologne theological faculty pressed for an appeal at the papal court. In 1516 a commission formed by Leo X again acquitted Reuchlin. However, the Pope suspended proceedings leaving Reuchlin with a moral if not a complete victory. In 1520 the Pope overturned even that victory with the condemnation of the *Augenspiegel* a few days after the issuance of his bull *Exsurge domine*, which threatened Luther with excommunication.

The literary battle kept pace with the legal. Although the lines of this battle were not clear-cut,[167] generally speaking humanists, while not supporting Reuchlin's defense of Jewish legal rights, supported their fellow humanist against the scholastic

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[166] The faculties made a distinction between the book as heretical, and the man who was not. They acknowledged Reuchlin's honourable reputation "for the integrity of his life and morals," and accomplishments as a "most learned man of singular and preeminent erudition, most knowledgeable in the three languages, Hebrew, Greek and Latin." Rummel 2002, 18.

[167] See Overfield, "A New Look at the Reuchlin Affair," and Oberman, "Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes to Judaism: Reuchlin, Erasmus and Luther." See also Ericka Rummel's excellent works, Rummel, "*Et cum theologo bella poeta gerit:* The Conflict between Humanists and Scholastics Revisited," Rummel 1995, Erika Rummel, *The Confessionalization of Humanism in Reformation Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and Rummel 2002.

theologians. Both sides published numerous texts, the most famous of which was the *Epistolae obscurorum virorum* written in 1515 by Ulrich von Hutten, Crotus Rubeanus and possibly others.

In the midst of this controversy, Reuchlin published *De arte cabalistica* portraying its main character, Simon the Jew, in a favourable light. The characters Philolaus and Marranus treated him with the utmost respect. On first meeting him, they praised his knowledge: "In the eyes of those who long for learning you are a guiding light."[168] After their first day of instruction "they were full of admiration for the quality of his teaching, his extraordinary kindness to strangers and above all for his dignified manner."[169] Although annoyed that the "wretched Sabbath" broke their discussion,[170] Simon's explanation of its significance as an act of purification permitting total concentration on the divine provided an attractive justification. [171] The two disciples heard sympathetically Simon's lament of "perverts" who twisted different rabbinical commentaries on the Scripture to "incite all good Christians to turn against us, though we live blamelessly and peaceably observing the laws of the state."[172]

How did this sympathetic portrayal fit with his earlier comments in the *Tütsch Missive* castigating the blasphemous Jews, and his attack on the Jews in *De verbo*

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[168] Reuchlin 1983, 45.
[169] Reuchlin 1983, 127.
[170] Reuchlin 1983, 127.
[171] "For six days we work and we rest the body on the seventh day allowing for the necessities of staying alive. Then we cleanse the will and in our minds concentrate on the divine. This is our holy day when, in peace of mind, we praise what is sacred and address ourselves to the service of God alone." Reuchlin 1983, 237.
[172] Reuchlin 1983, 67.

mirifico?[173] There, Reuchlin had written: "You [Jews] have subverted the Holy Books; therefore you rattle off your prayers in vain, in vain you invoke God, in vain because you speak to Him in self-made prayers, not in the way God wants to be worshipped. At the same time you hate us, us the true worshippers of God ...."[174] The following comments in *DAC* provide a clue to this apparent contradiction. "All true, non-sophist Kabbalists put their trust in the Messiah"[175]; Simon the Kabbalist spoke incisively "in argument, [was] serious and erudite in instruction...without artifices or high colouring... with little oratorical grease",[176] unlike sophists who prefered the cunningness and evasiveness of sophistry to show off rather than inform.[177]

It is not a great leap to see the equation in Reuchlin's mind of Talmudist[178] with scholastic (particularly the Cologne theologians), and Kabbalist with humanist. Like scholastics and humanists, Kabbalists clashed with Talmudists. For example, Kabbalists understood "all Salvationist prophecies as a reference to the spiritual liberation from Adam's "original breach of justice,"[179] whereas Talmudists understood them to refer to the physical liberation of the people of Israel from political injustice.[180]

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[173] Subsequently referred to as *DVM.*

[174] *De verbo mirifico*, fol. b 5^{v} quoted in Oberman, "Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes to Judaism: Reuchlin, Erasmus and Luther," 332.

[175] Reuchlin 1983, 105.

[176] Reuchlin 1983, 127.

[177] Reuchlin 1983, 57.

[178] Reuchlin defined Talmudist as "a man who interprets the Law in accordance with the author's intentions." Reuchlin 1983, 57.

[179] It is not my purpose to point out errors in Reuchlin's interpretation of Judaic practices generally or Kabbalistic thought specifically, only to note the ways in which contemporary discourses affected his thought in *DAC.*

[180] Reuchlin 1983, 107.

Talmudists remained in the physical world and were concerned with literal truth discerned by reason and syllogism. They devoted "great effort to the teachings and instructions of the Law, to exegesis, to giving directions, veneration and instruction."[181] They were the *pharisees* or the explainers who exhorted the people to carry out the six hundred and thirteen commandments through fear of the Lord. [182] The *pharisees* were similar to Christian 'slanderees' who condemned and interpreted new ideas such as those of Mirandola and Paul Ricci "with malignant intent."[183] Marranus commented on the ability of some academics (that is scholastics) to use "over-complicated proofs" to discredit certain premises or ideas as heresy. He concluded that one could not scrub a black man white (an inference to the black robes of the Dominican theologians), and therefore one had to let them use such "muddles of syllogisms" in the physical world of natural science and mathematical problems.

In contrast to this "crowd of unpredictable, brainless, one-eyed monsters," which undoubtably included those at whose hands "Reuchlin had suffered cruel persecution for more than five years,"[184] were those who were able to cross the threshold into the untouchable world of "arcane symbols and mysteries" through "the revelation of the Holy Spirit rather than the discovery of human reason."[185] These included the Kabbalists who turned away from the physical world through speculation on the mysterious, rather than the literal meaning of the Law.

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[181] Reuchlin 1983, 97.
[182] Reuchlin 1983, 97.
[183] Reuchlin 1983, 243.
[184] Reuchlin 1983, 235.
[185] Reuchlin 1983, 145.

Reuchlin extended tolerance only to those Jews who knew the Kabbalah and therefore were, in his estimation, potential converts to Christianity. Just as humanists trained in philology were able to find truth in ancient texts, he thought Jewish scholars educated in Kabbalah would be able to find the name of Jesus in the Hebrew letters for God.[186]

Conclusion

Historians have found it difficult to separate the Affair from the man whose name it bears; its interpretation and his motivation in defending Jewish books have become entwined. Participants and historians have interpreted the Reuchlin Affair either primarily as an eruption in the discourse of methodology, in the discourse of anti-Judaism, or in the discourse of reform that centred on Luther, and understood his motivation either primarily as an academic defending humanist scholarship, as a jurist upholding the legal rights of a minority, or a devout Christian seeking reform. [187]

However, as Heiko Oberman and Hans Peterse have pointed out, the Affair requires a more nuanced approach that acknowledges rather than ignores the "diverse factors" shaping the controversy.[188] A more nuanced approach to the Affair also requires a more nuanced approach to the man and his motivations. *DAC* was a visible expression of Reuchlin's position in the discourses of salvation, reform, methodology of knowledge, unity, magic, and anti-Judaism. His philological skills had apparently

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[186] Oberman, "Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes to Judaism: Reuchlin, Erasmus and Luther," 332-23.

[187] For an excellent summary of sixteenth-century interpretations, and modern historiography, see Rummel 2002.

[188] Rummel 2002, 39.

uncovered in ancient kabbalistic texts a path that could bring salvation both to the Church as a whole, and its members as individuals. In the epilogue addressed to Leo X, Reuchlin wrote that he sought to reveal kabbalistic learning "to our people through my work." Reuchlin also wrote *DAC* as proof of his "innocence, piety, faith and integrity".[189] It was, in essence, a plea for earthly salvation after years of persecution.

I suggest that while one cannot separate Reuchlin the persecuted from Reuchlin the scholar and philosopher, from Reuchlin the jurist, from Reuchlin the reformer, one can point to a prime motivation. I argue that Reuchlin's prime motivation was the search for truth in all aspects of his life, and the search for the most fundamental truth of all – the knowledge of God. In a culture that privileged ritual action and ancient wisdom, and that assumed a concrete, two-way interaction between the natural and supernatural, ritual activity was a plausible solution to the pressing issue of salvation as knowledge of God. For Reuchlin the Cabalist, the methodology of salvation was a nexus of Kabbalah, contemplation and theurgy.

[189] Reuchlin 1983, 358.

Chapter Three: The Methodology of Contact

> Pythagoras himself said that man could become an immortal god.[190]
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> Justin, the Christian thinker, wrote this as the first sentence of his *De recta confessione*: "Nothing that concerns the divine is clear to man."[191]

The word theurgy does not appear in *DAC*. Reuchlin does, however, explicitly reject "false magic," "occult nonsense," "Egyptian spells," and "secret signs," all descriptors that might apply to theurgy. Does this mean that Reuchlin's methodology was not theurgy? In this chapter I will review some of the historical roots of theurgy to which Reuchlin had access to build the the case for my contention that his 'true' magic, which drew its power from God and his angels,[192] was indeed theurgy.

The concept of theurgy arose in the Mediterranean world of the first few centuries C.E. in an explosion of what Sarah Iles Johnston calls an interest in revelatory wisdom,[193] and Brian Copenhaver terms the religious.[194] Scholars have labelled these streams of thought or practice Gnostic, Orphic, Oracular, Chaldean, Hermetic and Neoplatonic. The relationship of one to the other is both beyond the purpose of this thesis and my expertise, and is, moreover, probably unanswerable with

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[190] Reuchlin 1983, 231.
[191] Reuchlin 1983, 139.
[192] Reuchlin 1983, 125, 261, 269-75. Reuchlin does not use the term 'true magic'.
[193] Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgic Ascent in Its Cultural Milieu," 165.
[194] Copenhaver 1992, xxiv.

the slim textual data that remains. However, as I intend to show, each provided creative answers to the same question confronting *DAC*: how to contact God?

Was theurgy a set of techniques, a "theory of efficacy,"[195] or an "esoteric, revelatory religion"?[196] The etymological derivation of the word theurgy (*θεουργία*) tells us it is about god or theos (*θεος*), and work or ergon (*εργος*). It does not clarify the nature of the interaction between god, work, and humanity. Georg Lucks defines theurgy as a set of techniques designed to fulfill the need of pagan believers to directly contact their gods.[197] For now, this definition will suffice. Paraphrasing Wendy Doniger's comment in regards to the meaning of myth, defining theurgy requires "building up the sort of boundaries and barriers" that I am explicitly attempting to disrupt. Instead, following Doniger's example, I will let the examples I have chosen form "a cumulative working definition" that I will discuss in my last chapter.[198]

In the Pagan World

> Here is what Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian scholar, says in his book addressed to Aesclepius: "One part of man is simple and we call it the form of God's likeness," and a little later: "There are two images of God, namely, the world and man."[199]
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> The Socratic teaching given by Parmenides in Plato is: "Similarly our powers hold no sway; we do not come to know God by our kind of knowledge;" the Peripatetics

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[195] Janowitz 2002, 1.

[196] Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgic Ascent in Its Cultural Milieu," 165.

[197] Georg Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," in *Religion, Science, and Magic In Concert and In Conflict*, ed. Jacob Neusner, Ernest S. Frerichs, and Paul V. M. Flesher (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 185.

[198] Wendy Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics & Theology in Myth*, American Lectures on the History of Religions, no. 16 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 2, 3.

[199] Reuchlin 1983, 171.

say the same, as does Artistotle himself (first the designer, then the tool, as they say, of knowledge).[200]

The word theurgist first appeared in the extant fragments of the *Chaldean Oracles*.[201] This 'Bible' of theurgy,[202] so called by contemporary scholars, was a mixture of philosophic theology, cosmology, and anthropology depicting the soul as descending into and being trapped by the material world, and ritual techniques designed to release the soul from the body so that it could return to its divine home.[203] Fragment 110 directed the practitioner to "[s]eek out the channel of the soul, from where it <descended> in a certain order to serve the body; <and> seek <how> you will raise it up again to its order by combining (ritual) action with a sacred word."[204] Fragment 97 hinted at some type of ecstatic union with god: "<Taking wing>, the soul of mortals will press God into itself. And possessing nothing mortal, the soul is

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[200] Reuchlin 1983, 135.

[201] Hans Lewy, *Chaldean Oracles and Theurgy: Mysticism Magic and Platonism in the Later Roman Empire* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1956), 461.

[202] Luck refers to it as the 'Bible' of theurgy (185), and Majerick as the 'Bible of the Neoplatonists' (from Porphyry c232-303 C.E. to Damascius (c.462-537 C.E.) (2). Early modern intellectuals thought that the *Oracles* was a revelatory collection of divine wisdom of oracular origin. Only a few fragments survived, for the most part in the writings of the Neoplatonists. For an analysis of the context within which these fragments may have arisen see Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgic Ascent in Its Cultural Milieu." Luck describes the *Oracles'* style as enigmatic and obtruse: "its use of exuberant imagery would have made it difficult to use even then without the help of a spiritual guide or mentor." Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 185. Ruth Majercik calls the *Chaldean Oracles* "a collection of abstruse, hexameter verses purported to have been 'handed down by the gods' to a certain Julian the Chaldean and/or his son, Julian the Theurgist, who flourished during the late second century C.E." She suggests that the term 'Chaldean' could have designated Julian's "spiritual affinity with the wisdom of the East," one who is adept in magic, or the actual homeland of the elder Julian. However, there is also evidence of Syrian origin. Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Studies in Greek and Roman Religion, Series Editor H. S. Versnel, no. 5 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989), 1. Dodds says that as far as we know, Julian is the earliest person to be termed a theurgist. Julian the Theurgist was some kind of spiritual advisor to Marcus Aurelius and was supposedly able to assist the Emperor in his military campaigns through magical means. E. R. Dodds, "Appendix II: Theurgy," in *The Greeks and the Irrational* E. R. Dodds (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 283.

[203] Copenhaver 1992, xxv.

[204] Majercik 1989, 91.

completely intoxicated <by God>. Therefore boast of the harmony under which the mortal body exists."[205] As the previous sentence indicates, its teachings were concerned with the body as well as the soul. Julian introduced the oracular statement, "Save also the mortal covering of bitter matter" by saying "that through the holy rites not only the soul, but even the body is thought worthy of much help and salvation."[206]

The "blessed theurgists,"[207] rather than the gods, appeared to have been both the beneficiaries of the holy rites through salvation of soul and body and, on the surface at least, the instigators. They could actively compel the gods downwards[208] through binding spells, [209] and the use of statues. However, the will of the gods directed the will of the theurgists. Theurgists could only learn their skills from the gods, and that presumably required their consent.[210] If these skills were not used in accordance with their will, the gods maintained ultimate control by sending man "on empty pathways, as whenever, in a disorderly and incorrect fashion, [man made] the ascent to the most holy of the visions or works." [211] The practices that mediated this

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[205] Majercik 1989, 87.

[206] Fragment 129: Majercik 1989, 99.

[207] Fragment 194: Majercik 1989, 123.

[208] See also Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 191. He comments that "it is reasonable to suppose that even theurgy is a form of pressure."

[209] Fragment 220: "And, again, another (god), being compelled, said: 'Listen to me, although I do not wish it, since you have bound me by Necessity.'" Fragment 223: "And next (Hecate says): 'Drawing them down from the ether by unspeakable spells,you brought them easily to this earth against their will ....'" Majercik 1989, 135, 137.

[210] Fragment 222: "I have come, hearkening to your very eloquent prayer, which the nature of mortals has discovered at the suggestion of the gods." Fragment 224: "That even (the gods) themselves have advised how their statues ought to be made and from what kind of material, will be clear from the statements of Hecate to this effect: 'But execute my statue, purifying it as I shall instruct you ....'" Majercik 1989, 135, 137. These fragments are among a number that contemporary scholars question as to their Chaldean origin. See Majercik 1989, 46. I have chosen to use them because early modern thinkers would not have been aware of any distinction in origin.

[211] Fragment 136: "For in terms of both contemplative vision and telestic art, it is this which makes the ascent safe and sure for us – progress in an orderly fashion. At any rate, as the oracle says: / 'For no other reason does God turn away from man and, with his living power, send him on empty

interaction consisted mainly of "holy rites" using material "symbols and tokens"[212] such as stones, herbs, bull-roarers, magic wheels, incantations, sacred words such as the "*nomina barbara*,"[213] and various apotropaic devices such as brass instruments,[214] amulets, sacred stones, and animal sacrifices. Some of these rituals also appeared to require some type of contemplative technique, in other words internal as well as external ritual.[215]

Piecing together information from the *Oracles* as well as material from other relevant sources, Majercik has re-constructed what Lewy terms the central theurgical rite or sacramental mystery: the elevation or salvation of the soul on the rays of the sun.[216] First, the soul was purified or strengthened through ascetic practices and a series of material rites involving stones, herbs, and incantations. The body was buried to mimic death and then rituals done to encourage separation of the soul from the

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pathways,'/ as whenever, in a disorderly and incorrect fashion, we make the ascent to the most holy of the visions or works." Majercik 1989, 101.

[212] Symbols and tokens linked every material thing in the natural world with spiritual entities in the supernatural world. Although used by the theurgists to achieve union with the gods, their exact nature is still unclear. Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 201.

[213] Fragment 110: "Seek out the channel of the soul, from where it <descended> in a certain order to serve the body; <and> seek <how> you will rise it up again to its order by combining (ritual) action with a sacred word." Majercik 1989, 91. Fragment 150: "'Do not change the *nomina barbara*;' that is, the names handed down by the gods to each race have ineffable power in the initiation rites." Majercik 1989, 107.

[214] Majercik comments on the custom of clanging brass pots and pans during the Roman Lemuria. Majercik 1989, 30.

[215] Fragment 1: "For there exists a certain Intelligible which you must perceive by the flower of mind." Fragment 2: "... you must cast into your imagination the entire token of the triad, and not go toward the empyrean channels in a scattered way, but with concentration." Majercik 1989, 49. Fragment 9a: "... extend the perceptive faculty in the soul toward the One." Majercik 1989, 53.

[216] Majercik 1989, 36-45. See also Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism,", 192-4, and Lewy 1956, 207-211. See Fragment 130: "and rest in God, drawing in the flowering flames which come down from the father. From these flames, as they are descending, the soul plucks the soul-nourished flower of fiery fruits." Majercik 1989, 99.

body. The soul then proceeded upwards, guided by the theurgist, the aid of angels,[217] and Teletarchs,[218] hymns and prayers, and protected from demons by the chanting of *voces mysticae.* Debatably, the highest moments of ascent appeared to involve "a genuine contemplative experience free of external manipulation."[219]

Similar techniques also brought the gods or other spiritual entities downwards for both material and spiritual purposes. Practitioners swung the magic wheel of Hecate, engraved with magical characters, to imitate the motion of the heavenly spheres and hence sympathetically attract messengers who could both mediate with the gods or, for example, cause rain to fall.[220] Theurgists contacted or were "conjoined" with supernatural entities by the rhythmical chanting of unintelligible sounds, which were equated with the hidden or divine names of the entity,[221] or by burying spices, plants, and stones associated with the entity. This might be for the purpose of prophecy, or to receive its aid during the soul's ascent. A specific deity could be conjured up for the purpose of prophecy either through animating its statue by placing objects with a direct sympathy or correspondence to the deity in the statue's mouth and

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[217] Fragment 122: "How does the order of angels cause the soul to ascend?/ 'By making the soul bright with fire...'/ (the oracle says). That is illuminating the soul on all sides and filling it with pure fire, which gives it an unswerving order and power through which it does not rush into material disorder but makes contact with the light of the divine beings." Majercik 1989, 95. Fragment 123 "And (the order of angels) causes a separation with matter by/ '...lightening (the soul) with a warm breath,'/ and causing a rising up through the anagogic life..."Majercik 1989, 97.

[218] See Fragments 85 and 86. Majercik 1989, 83. The Teletarchs were part of a complex chain of lesser spiritual entities that filled the spaces between the Highest God and the world of matter. Other beings in the Chaldean system were Iynges, Connectors, Angels, and Demons. Majercik 1989, 8-9.

[219] Majercik 1989, 39.

[220] Majercik 1989, 30. Entities also presided over magical operations in their role as couriers between the sensible and intelligible worlds. Fragment 78: Majercik 1989, 81 and notes: Majercik 1989, 172.

[221] *Nomina barbara* or *voces mysticae.* Majercik 1989, 25.

reciting prayers,[222] or using ritualistic utterances first binding it to and then loosing it from a human medium.

The *Hermetica,*[223] a large body of literature with theurgical import, contained the same mixture of intellectual and practical content as the *Oracles*. The *Asclepius*, one of the texts falling under this scholarly classification, described itself as a discourse about the "kinship and associations between humans and god." It suggested that divinity and humanity were beholden to each other for their existence, and their salvation. "God shape[d] mankind from the nature of soul and of body, from the eternal and the mortal."[224] The power of god enabled mankind's ascent back to god. At the same time, mankind strengthened the gods.[225] According to its writings, mankind made the gods from "a mixture of plants, stones and spices ... that have in them a natural power of divinity."[226] Ultimately, however, the relationship between god and man was controlled by "the most supreme and high god" through whom man had

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[222] Again from Fragment 224:"Make a form from wild rue and decorate it with small animals, such as lizards which live about the house. Rub a mixture of myrrh, gum and frankincense with these animals, and out in the clear air under the waxing moon, complete this (statue) yourself while offering the following prayer." Majercik 1989, 137.

[223] This literature grew out of the Graeco-Egyptian culture of ancient Egypt under Ptolemic, Roman, and Byzantine rule. Scholars suggest that works attributed to, or involving, Hermes Trismegistus may be dated from as early as the fourth century B.C.E., and as late as the fifth century C.E.. Scholars have categorized these manuscripts into several different groupings, which may have more to do with "the accidents of textual transmission" (xxxii), or the prejudices of ancient compilers and modern scholars. Hermes appears in the more technically focused astrological, alchemical and natural-historical *Hermetica*, and the Greek and Demotic Magical Papyri, which aims "to manipulate the divine and the natural worlds for more or less concrete and immediate purposes" (xxxvi). He also appears in what scholars label the more theoretically or philosophically oriented seventeen treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the "Latin Aesclepius, the forty Hermetic texts and fragments collected in the Anthology of Stobaeus, the three *Hermetica* found with the *Nag Hammadi* Codices, the Armenian *Definitions*, and the Vienna fragments"(xxxii-iii). The theoretical manuscripts presented a theory of salvation through knowledge (xxxvii). Taken from Copenhaver 1992.

[224] Copenhaver 1992, 71.

[225] See especially pp 71, 80, 92 in the Aesclepius, Copenhaver 1992. "[Mankind] not only advances toward god; he also makes the gods strong" (80).

[226] Copenhaver 1992, 90.

attained the "light of knowledge" to save both soul and body. While this knowledge could be used for such material purposes as predicting the future, causing and curing illness, or bringing pain and pleasure,[227] the final good for those who have received knowledge, according to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, was "to be made god."[228]

Mystery cult initiates called their goal God. The philosopher Plato called it the One, the Good, and the Beautiful. Plato's primary methodology was not external ritual however, but purification and contemplative vision (*theōria*). Plato taught that contemplation finally lifted *nous*, the divine element of the soul, from the material world of appearances to the supernatural world of forms or ideas.[229]

Ritual techniques, revelatory wisdom, and Platonic philosophy came together in the syncretic work of later Neoplatonic philosophers, from Plotinus to Proclus. Damascius (480-550 C.E.), the last of the Neoplatonic philosophers at Plato's Academy in Athens, wrote that "some, such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and many others honor philosophy more highly, while Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus and the theurgists give more honor to the hieratic art."[230] Plotinus (204/5-270 C.E.) continued Plato's trajectory of thought, based on what he interpreted as his own personal experience of contact and brief union with God. According to Plotinus, only "an inward discipline of the mind" [231] could lift the higher soul[232] to union with God. However, while he

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[227] Copenhaver 1992, 81.
[228] Copenhaver 1992, 6.
[229] Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Origins to the Fifth Century*, vol. 1: *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), 23-6.
[230] Gregory Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," in *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought and Religion*, ed. R. E. Kaske et al., vol. 41 (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 2.
[231] Dodds, "Appendix II: Theurgy," 286.

rejected external ritual techniques such as "melodies, shrieks, whisperings and hissing with the voice"[233] as well as prayer, it appeared that by contemplation he meant some type of mental imaging technique or ritual. "*Enneads* 1.6.9 offered the following advice: "'Withdraw inside yourself,' followed by the analogy of making a statue." Perhaps he was comparing this technique to the external Hermetic ritual used to make a statue.[234] Scholars have debated over whether Plotinus was a theurgist or magician as well as a philosopher.[235]

Neither Plotinus nor Porphyry (233-309 C.E.) questioned the efficacy of magic or ritual in the natural world, or its ability to affect the irrational soul. While Plotinus felt the "mind of the wise"[236] was safe from magical influences, Porphyry thought theurgy could pose a threat to even the well-intended practitioner by exposing him to evil daemons. [237] While Plotinus appeared to reject any external ritual, Porphyry was not so certain. He felt that while philosophers like himself did not require theurgical rituals, these rituals could benefit the masses. Luck comments that Porphyry thought theurgy "[did] achieve purification of the soul, but it [did] not enable the soul to return to the deity."[238] However, Smith suggests that Porphyry might have advocated a role

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[232] The amount of effort required to return the soul from whence it came seems to have depended on whether a particular philosopher felt it had completely descended into matter, or whether it had left some of itself with the gods: "for if the soul never completely descends, then it already has the means to reascend and has no need of divine assistance through theurgic rite." Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 13-14. Unlike Plotinus and Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus felt that the soul had completely descended.

[233] From *Enneads* 2.9.14 quoted in Janowitz 2002, 15.

[234] Janowitz 2002, 16, note 58.

[235] Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 205-8.

[236] Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 205.

[237] Information in this paragraph taken from Andrew Smith, *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: A Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 124-32, and Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 205-10.

[238] Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 209.

for theurgy as some type of contemplative practice in the ultimate ascent.[239] This seeming contradiction might imply that Porphyry considered theurgy to encompass both external and internal ritual

If the *Chaldean Oracles* was the bible of theurgy, Neoplatonists were its disciples. [240] Most of what we know about theurgy comes through their interpretative writings. Porphyry wrote that certain theurgic consecrations enabled the soul to see the gods.[241] Iamblichus (243-327 C.E.) suggested that both philosophers and theurgists pursued union with the gods but by different means.[242] Both Iamblichus and Proclus (410/11-85 C.E.) privileged "ineffable acts" over "human wisdom." In *De Mysteriis*[243] Iamblichus wrote:

> Intellectual understanding does not connect theurgists with divine beings, for what would prevent those who philosophize theoretically from having theurgic union with the gods? But this is not true; rather, it is the perfect accomplishment of ineffable acts, religiously performed and beyond all understanding, and it is the power of ineffable symbols comprehended by the gods alone, that establishes theurgical union. Thus we do not perform these acts intellectually; for then their efficacy would be intellectual and would depend on us, neither of which is true. In fact, these very symbols, by themselves, perform their own work, without our thinking; and the ineffable power of the gods to whom these symbols elevate us, recognizes by itself its own images. It is not awakened to this by our thinking.[244]

Like Iamblichus, Proclus believed that man required theurgy to reach divine power. Human wisdom was not capable of it. He described theurgy as "a power higher than

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[239] Smith 1974, 130.

[240] Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 187, 205.

[241] Janowitz 2002, 8, and Johnston, "Rising to the Occasion: Theurgic Ascent in Its Cultural Milieu," 179.

[242] Lewy 1956, 462.

[243] Lewy calls the teachings of this text "a free combination of Neoplatonic, Chaldean and Hermetic doctrines." Lewy 1956, 463.

[244] From *De mysteriis* 96.13-97.9; quoted in Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 10.

all human wisdom embracing the blessings of divination, the purifying powers of initiation and in a word all the operations of divine possession."[245] He claimed that, through his own ritual practice, his soul had reached the heavens.[246]

In the Arab World

> The Arab philosophers were more my special interest – Algazel, Alpharabi, Abucaten, Hali, Abumaron, Abensina (you will know him as Avicenna), Abenrust (that is Averroes), and other peripatetics like them.[247]

In the ninth century, under the direction of the 'Abbāsid caliphate, Arabic scholars preserved, translated, and interpreted Greek manuscripts into Arabic. Translation of these Arabic texts into Latin began in the mid-twelfth century, spurred on by an interest in natural philosophy and medicine. Toledo with its mix of well-educated Latin clergy, Jewish scholars, and Muslim inhabitants, was at the centre of this program. Frederick II, Holy Roman emperor from 1212–1250, also encouraged scholarly collaboration within his Kingdom of Sicily, which included most of Southern Italy. Jewish scholars[248] assisted their Christian counterparts with Arabic, as well as Hebrew texts. Latin translators in this period used Arabic translations of Greek texts, including Arabic commentary (Averroes for instance), rather than Greek texts as the basis for their translations.[249] Four texts in particular added to an early modern

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[245] From *Platonic Theology* I.26.63; quoted in Janowitz 2002, 11.

[246] From Marinus (*Life of Proclus* 28); quoted in Janowitz 2002, 12.

[247] Reuchlin 1983, 43.

[248] Regardless of more ancients sources, Idel speculates that until the Renaissance "it is probable that the main, and perhaps single channel of information to Jewish medieval authors was Muslim culture." Idel *Hasidim* 1995, 82.

[249] Information drawn from Peter Adamson, "Al-Kindî and the Reception of Greek Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion of Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C.

understanding of the connection between the worlds. These texts discussed techniques to facilitate that contact, and who mediated it. The first two texts emphasized material goals of contact, the next two spiritual goals. However, as with the *Hermetica*, it is often difficult to make such clear-cut distinctions.

De radiis (*On Stellar Rays*),[250] attributed to al-Kindi,[251] posited, as its title suggests, that the medium for transmitting supernatural power was a particular force or rays[252] emanating from and unique to every celestial body. This force also emanated from and connected all things. Through intention and will, the practitioner was able to activate, and then use these rays to affect his environment. Focusing on the names of God or a powerful angel enhanced this ability. As well, using figures, characters, images, sacrifices, and, in particular, words, all of which also emitted rays, added to the efficacy of such operations.[253]

Taylor, Cambridge Companions (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and Charles Burnett, "Arabic into Latin: the Reception of Arabic Philosophy into Western Europe," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, Cambridge Companions (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[250] Extant only in its Latin version in a number of medieval manuscripts. Thorndike Vol 1 1923, 43, note 2.

[251] Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Isḥāq al-Kindī (d. ca 870 C.E.) was at the centre of one of the Arabic translation circles. Although not a translator himself, he used the translations of his circle in his own extensive and eclectic writings. He was heavily influenced by both Aristotle and Neoplatonism. There is some question as to his authorship of *De radiis*. Burnett, "Arabic into Latin: the Reception of Arabic Philosophy into Western Europe," 383.

[252] Christopher Lehrich describes them as "conduits of power." Christopher Lehrich, *Language of Demons and Angels: Cornelius Agrippa's Occult Philosophia*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, Series Editor A. J. Vanderjagt (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 119.

[253] Information in this paragraph drawn from Thorndike Vol 1 1923, 642-646, and Lehrich 2003, 117-19.

While the *Ghāyat al-hakīm*[254] (*The Aim of the Sage* or *Picatrix* in Latin)) claimed as its purpose the union of the individual soul with the intellect of the universe,[255] it also focused on more materialistic aims. It methodology purported to bring about both the transformation or perfection of self, and "the acquisition of health, wealth and women, and the destruction of his enemies."[256] The *Ghāyat* suggested procedures by which one could drawn down celestial power into appropriate material objects or talismans, or elaborate ritual to invoke the aid of "*pneumata*, spirits, angels, and planetary spirits" as conduits of this power.[257] It considered its contents "the roots of the magic art," [258] and magic as the pinnacle of learning reached only after mastering many other fields of knowledge.[259]

Abu Bakher ibn Ṭufayl's (ca. 1116-1185) *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* re-told the tale of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān,* a young boy growing up on a deserted island, who ascended through

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[254] The unknown author or compiler, as Pingree calls him, of the *Ghāyat* appears to have written this book towards the middle of the eleventh century in Spain. Pingree uses the word compiler for good reason; the *Ghāyat* claims to have drawn from two hundred and twenty-four books. Pingree suggests that it not only drew directly from the Arabic texts on "Hermeticism, Sābianism, Ismā'īlism, astrology, alchemy and magic produced in the Near East in the ninth and tenth centuries A.D.," which reflected a strong Neoplatonic flavour, but also indirectly from Indian, Iranian, Meopotamian and Egyptian concepts. David Pingree, "Some of the Sources of the Ghâyat Al-Hakîm," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 43 (1980): 2-3. The text was translated into Spanish in the twelfth century, and then into Latin at an unknown date. Kaske and Clark 1989, 45. Thorndike suggests no earlier than the thirteenth century, and no later than the fifteenth. He comments that it was well known in Latin by 1514. Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science: During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*, vol. 2 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1923), 813-14. Hebrew translations appeared after the Latin. Moshe Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," in *Jewish Thought in the Sixteenth Century*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983) 192.

[255] Bernd Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic From Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, Groningen Studies in Cultural Change, General Editor M. Gosman, no. 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 240-1.

[256] Pingree, "Some of the Sources of the Ghâyat Al-Hakîm," 15.

[257] Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 241.

[258] The Latin translation begins: "Incipit theorica artium magicarum." Kaske and Clark 1989, 50.

[259] Thorndike Vol 2 1923, 815-16.

the different fields of knowledge to achieve some type of union or conjunction with God.[260] This moment of illumination, which Aaron Hughes terms an initiation "into the secrets of the universe,"[261] came through a ritual dance that appeared to emulate the movement of the planets.[262] *Kitāb al-Hadā'iq (Book of Imaginary Circles)* suggested that a Universal Soul[263] mediated between heaven and earth. Ibn al-Sīd al-Baṭalyawsī (1052-1127) allegorized it as a ladder upon which both Divine inspiration and angels descended, and purified spirits ascended to the supernal world.[264] As Altmann notes, he probably considered angels to carry this inspiration, which translated to the ability to prophesize.

Following these last two texts and reminiscent of Iamblichus, Arabic philosopher Ibn al'Arabī (1165-1240) rejected reason as a means of knowing God. In his *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya,* he commented that while the pious Muslim was able to enter into the Divine Mystery, his fellow traveller, the philosopher, was only able to reach the seventh heaven.[265]

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[260] By observing natural phenomena, he teaches himself first the physical and biological sciences, then the astronomical sciences and finally the supreme science of metaphysics. Aaron W. Hughes, *The Texture of the Divine: Imagination in Medieval Islamic and Jewish Thought* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 25.

[261] Hughes 2004, 19.

[262] Stéphane Toussaint, "Ficino's Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy?: A Note on *Spiritus*, the *Three Books on Life*, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza," *Accademia* 2 (2000): 24.

[263] Very briefly, this is a Plotinian concept that posited various stages between the One and humanity.

[264] "They [the philosophers who admit the existence of the Universal Soul] hold that between its supernal limit and its lowest limit there is a line (*khaṭt*) which connects [the two circles], which they call 'the ladder of the ascensions' (*sullam al-ma'ārij*)." Translated from the Arabic text of *Book of the Circles* from *Al-Andalus* V (1940), 71; quoted in A. Altmann, "The Ladder of Ascension," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G. Scholem on His Seventieth Birthday by Pupils, Colleagues and Friends*, ed. E. E. Urbach et al. (Jersusalem: Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1967), 7.

[265] R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1927), 239; quoted in Altmann, "The Ladder of Ascension," 4.

In the Christian World

> This goes beyond the intellectual faculties of all of us: we are unable by rational methods to entertain things that are by definition contradictory. We are used to things that are by their very nature obvious. Rationality falls far short of the infinite power we have been talking about, it cannot simultaneously connect these contradictories that are separated by infinity. (A German philosopher-archbishop handed down this dictum some fifty-two years ago.)[266]
>
> These words [from Gregory of Nazianzus, the Greek theologian] make it clear that your most learned sages, like ours, believe that Moses gave the text of the Law to the people, but kept the mysteries, parables and symbols for himself and the elite.[267]

Christianity, arising from the same environment as theurgy, also asked how to contact God. Not surprisingly, some of its answers were the same. Morton Smith claims that "one or more techniques for ascent into heaven were being used in Palestine in Jesus' day, and that Jesus himself may well have used one."[268] Paul wrote in II Corinthians 12: 2: "I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body, I do not know; God knows." Whether this person in Christ was Jesus, as Smith suggests, or Paul himself,[269] is irrelevant to my argument. The point here is that the verse appears to confirm that the journey upwards remained a part of early Christianity. Perhaps the rite of baptism was a theurgical technique designed to create a connection between Jesus

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[266] Reuchlin 1983, 123. "Nicholas of Cusa, 1401-1464, cardinal, mathematician, scholar, and mysticizing Platonist philosopher. He was the first great humanist of German origin and had much influence on Reuchlin." Reuchlin 1983, 373, note 33.

[267] Reuchlin 1983, 295.

[268] Morton Smith, "Ascent to the Heavens and the Beginnings of Christianity," *Eranos Jahrbuch* 50 (1981): 415.

[269] McGinn 1991, 66-70.

and his followers, with the hope that they too could ascend to heaven, either after death or on the Judgement Day.[270]

Despite the similarities, Christianity severed the direct link between god and humanity. Salvation was no longer the soul's awakening or recognition of and reunification with its divine source.[271] It offered another solution: a new and apparently efficacious mediator – a demi-god, who in his divine and human natures bridged the abyss between heaven and earth. The Roman Church re-interpreted salvation as the redemption through Christ from Adam's original sin. However, not surprisingly, older conceptions of salvation and methodologies of contact did not disappear. Instead, Christian thinkers attempted to incorporate them, with varying degrees of success, into the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*,[272] which made any direct contact with the Christian god difficult, if not impossible, and resulted in a number of creative solutions. For instance, Gnostic Christians emphasized salvation through *gnōsis* "of the hidden divine nature of their fallen souls,"[273] while Clement (d. ca. 215 C.E.) held onto the idea of re-unification: "the Logos of God became man, so that you may learn from man how man may become God."[274]

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[270] Smith, "Ascent to the Heavens and the Beginnings of Christianity," 418-20.

[271] This reflects the idea of creation through emanation that appears in both Neoplatonic and kabbalistic thought. In this concept, all of creation is thought to flow from God in an unbroken hierarchy of being, and share in his divine substance. See *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Emanationism", http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05397b.htm, (accessed August 16, 2006).

[272] "In technically theological and philosophical use it expresses the act whereby God brings the entire substance of a thing into existence from a state of non-existence." *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Creation", http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06701a.htm, (accessed August 16 2006). This doctrine posits a separation or abyss between God and humanity with the significant implication that humanity can in no way participate in God's divinity. This produces a tension for some Christian thinkers, and a boundary around which they must carefully tread so as not to appear heretical.

[273] McGinn 1991, 92.

[274] From *Discourse (Protrepticus)* (1:8 [1:9.9-11]); quoted in McGinn 1991, 107.

However, Clement also suggested a vision of, rather than unification with, God as a more orthodox method of maintaining the gap between God and humanity. He wrote of the Gnostic souls who "keep always moving to higher and yet higher regions, until they no longer greet the divine vision in or by means of mirrors (1 Cor 12:13), but with loving hearts feast forever on the uncloying, never-ending sight .... This is the apprehensive vision (*katalēptikē theōria*) of the pure of heart (Matt 5:8)."[275] In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225 –1274) wrote that the intellect could achieve union with God through such a vision of the Divine Essence, either imperfectly before death through contemplation, or perfectly after death.[276] The Church captured this idea in its doctrine of the beatific vision,[277] but allowed that in very rare and exceptional circumstances their highest dignitaries could achieve such a vision before death.[278]

Contemplation was an acceptable means of achieving such a vision, although the term appeared to encompass a variety of practices. Augustine (354-430 C.E.) accepted, based on his own experience, that contemplative and ecstatic means[279] rather

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[275] McGinn 1991, 105.

[276] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (1920), <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2003.htm>, Catholic Encyclopedia, New Advent, (accessed March 22, 2007), I of II: Q3, Article 8. "Therefore the last and perfect happiness, which we await in the life to come, consists entirely in contemplation. But imperfect happiness, such as can be had here, consists first and principally in contemplation...." Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* I of II: Q3, Article 5.

[277] "The immediate knowledge of God which the angelic spirits and the souls of the just enjoy in Heaven. It is called 'vision' to distinguish it from the mediate knowledge of God which the human mind may attain in the present life. And since in beholding God face to face the created intelligence finds perfect happiness, the vision is termed 'beatific.'" *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, s.v. "Beatific Vision" <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02364a.htm>, (accessed March 22, 2007).

[278] Robert Mathiesen, "A Thirteenth-Century Ritual to Attain the Beatific Vision," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger, The Magic in History Series (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 157.

[279] McGinn 1991, 231-36.

than "filthy cleansings by sacrilegious rites could facilitate a vision of gods or angels.[280] John Cassian (born ca. 360 C.E.) emphasized unceasing prayer or the constant repetition of a short verse from Scripture as a means of achieving a contemplative vision of God.[281] Pseudo-Dionysius[282] (fifth century C.E.) also considered contemplation as an efficacious way of contacting God:

> In the diligent exercise of mystical contemplation, leave behind the senses and the operations of the intellect, and all things sensible and intellectual, and all things in the world of being and non-being, that thou mayest arise by unknowing towards the union, as afar as is attainable, with Him who transcends all being and all knowledge.[283]

Jean Gerson also advocated contemplation as the means to ascend to God. In the *Mountain of Contemplation*, he described what he considered to be the various stages of contemplation through which one could 'know' God. However, rather than a description of union, he vaguely described its culmination as sometimes seeming to be "full of the glory and praise of God."[284] He treated any reports of vision with "mistrust and caution."[285]

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[280] Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Random House, 1950), bk.10, chap. 10.

[281] McGinn 1991, 222-6.

[282] "Modern scholarship has settled the fact that Dionysius the Areopagite, although confused with St. Dionysius, or St. Denis the Martyr and patron saint of Paris, has no historical connection with him. It has, too, settled the fact that *The Mystical Theology* and the other Dionysian writings did not come into existence until centuries after St. Paul's Athenian convert. In fact, it is almost certain that the writer was either a pupil of Proclus or, as is more probable, of Damascius, the second in succession from Proclus, and one of the last teachers of the Athenian Platonic school. It was natural that when he became a Christian writer he should assume a name which had sacred memories of Athenian faith, and which was also a link with Greek culture." Introduction to The Mystical Theology of Dionysius the Areopagite Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Mystical Theology and the Celestial Hierarchies of Dionysius the Areopagite* Translated from the Greek with Commentaries by the Editors of The Shrine of Wisdom and Poem by St. John of the Cross (Surrey, England: The Shrine of Wisdom, 1949), 7.

[283] Dionysius the Areopagite 1949, 9.

[284] Gerson 1998, 25.

[285] Otto Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt and in collaboration with Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff, vol. 2,

On the other hand, Geert Groote (1340-1384), the acknowledged founder of the *Devotio Moderna*,[286] emphasized the importance of having an interior vision of God in order "to receive his benefits."[287] He suggested that external actions and bodily gestures were symbols and signs of inward devotion: "The greatest utility of bodies is in their use of signs. For from them are made many signs necessary for our salvation ...."[288] Salvation came through the cultivation of inner devotion with the assistance of Christ, prayer and meditation. Gerhard Zerbolt van Zutphen (1367-1398), one of the first Brothers of the Common Life, advocated the exercises of *lectio* (spiritual reading), *meditatio, oratio,* and *contemplatio* in the imitation of Christ as the means of ascending to God. He described meditation as an internal ritual of "diligently turn[ing] over in your heart whatsoever you have read or heard, earnestly ruminating on the same."[289] In *De imitatione Christ,*[290] Thomas à Kempis rejected all formal theological and philosophic learning as a means of understanding God. That could only come through close conformity to Christ and an adherence to the Gospel. John Wessel Gansfort (ca. 1419-1489) and John Mombaer (1460-1501) developed methods of

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World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest, no. 17 (New York: Crossroad, 1987-1991), 171.

[286] "A late medieval religious reform movement that began in the Netherlands in the late fourteenth century and quickly spread into Germany." Two movements, the Brethren of the Common Life, and the Sisters of the Common Life grew out of Groot's leadership. The *Devotio Moderna* was essentially a lay movement characterized by its "nonconformity, modern individualism, rejection of externals in religious practice, alienation from the church, and its rejection of binding vows." It cultivated the spiritual life through inner devotion. Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," 176, 179.

[287] Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," 180.

[288] Quoted in Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," 181.

[289] Quoted in Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," 182.

[290] The authorship of this book has been disputed, with parts of it being attributed to Zerbolt and Groote. Gründler, "Devotio Moderna," 183.

meditative prayer consisting of various steps or *scalae*, and mnemotechnical verses as aids to memory.[291]

The internal ritual of contemplation was one method of knowing God, external ritual was another. Unlike Augustine, Pseudo-Dionysius incorporated both in his methodology. He equated the central Christian rite of the Eucharist with the theurgic mysteries, calling Jesus the principle, and essence of every theurgy.[292] He suggested that priests used the symbolic actions and words to divinize not only bread and wine but also its participants.[293] He emphasized the importance of these external rituals not only in divinization, but also in enlisting the assistance of celestial beings to help the believer climb the ladder towards assimilation and union with God.[294] He contended that one could not contemplate the Celestial Hierarchies without the material symbols of bread, wine, water, oil, incense, painting, and music, and their conversion from the realm of the senses to the service of God through the theurgical art.[295] Like Origen[296] (185– ca. 254) before him, he claimed that divine names had ritual power because they were "specific manifestations of divine power on earth."[297] Origen had emphasized

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[291] The use of mnemotechnical techniques was common throughout the Middle Ages. For more information see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, General Editor Alastair Minnis, no. 34 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), and Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966).

[292] From *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.1, 3.5.432 and *Celestial Hierarchy* 1.3.121; quoted in Janowitz 2002, 13, and Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 3.

[293] Dionysius claimed "Sacred deification occurs in him directly from God." From *Ecclesiatical Hierarchy* 2.1; quoted in Janowitz 2002, 42-3.

[294] See Dionysius the Areopagite 1949, 29 and Andrew Louth, *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition, From Plato to Denys* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), 168-9.

[295] Louth 1981, 169.

[296] Origen, scholar and theologian, was one of the early Fathers of the Church.

[297] Janowitz 2002, 42. She continues: Dionysius will "never say that a priest can say whatever he wants over the Eucharist, for transformation at the Eucharist is dependent on having the exact formula spoken over the bread and the wine." (*ex opera operato*).

that speaking divine names, such as Jesus, in the original divine language of Hebrew rather than in translation[298] was "[m]ore powerful than any incantation."[299]

A particular genre of texts dating from perhaps the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries continued this emphasis on external ritual as a means of contacting the divine. Frank Klaassen provides the following description of their purpose:

> More analogous to religion than science, ritual magic frequently sets out to achieve direct experience of [spiritual intelligences], either through a human medium or in a waking or dream vision. Interior experience in the interpretation of visions (either experienced or reported), the necessity of achieving certain spiritual states, and the use of contemplative exercises sets this tradition apart as well. Often characterized as *theurgic*, the texts also commonly seek spiritual or intellectual enlightenment, once again emphasizing interiority.[300]

I will limit my discussion to three examples in order to illustrate their similarities to ancient theurgical practices and the possible links between ancient and early modern texts: the Solomonic *Ars Notoria*, the *Liber visionum beate et intemerate Dei genetricis virginis Marie*, and the *Liber sacer sive juratus* or the *Sacred or Sworn Book of Honorius of Thebes*. Again, I bracket the issue of origins, influences, and transmission, merely noting that the similarities appear to be more than coincidental.[301]

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[298] Janowitz 2002, 37. The debate about whether words were arbitrarily assigned through human usage, or divinely given in accordance with their true nature begins with Plato's Cratylus. For a summary see Brian Vickers, "Analogy versus Identity: The Rejection of Occult Symbolism, 1580-1680," in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984). See also Clark 1997, 284-90, and D. P. Walker, *The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism From the Fifteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Duckworth, 1972), 25.

[299] From *Homilies on Joshua* (20.1); quoted in Janowitz 2002, 37.

[300] Frank Klaassen, "Medieval Ritual Magic in the Renaissance," *Aries* 3, no. 2 (2003): 172.

[301] Klaassen makes the following comment: "Employing their direct experience in the magical art and styling themselves as divinely inspired Christian magi, these practitioners often wrote new works of ritual magic or transformed and supplemented the older ones. They were not, thus, simply passive transmitters of ancient information, but active researchers and disseminators of occult information." Klaassen, "Medieval Ritual Magic in the Renaissance," 173.

The circulation of the *Ars Notoria* appears to have been extensive and widespread in medieval and early modern Europe.[302] These texts drew their authority from Solomon, to whom it was thought God had granted "*sapientia, scientia et intelligencia.*"[303] Rather than direct knowledge of God, this genre of texts sought skills of learning such as memory, and knowledge of the seven liberal arts as well as visions by means of "complex rites, purifications, confession, drawn figures [*notae*] and orations or invocations."[304] However, this knowledge was sought so that "being illuminated, strengthened and exalted by the Science obtained, [the practitioner might] know thee and love thee and love the knowledge and wisdome of thy Scriptures."[305] The *notae* were aids to meditation; the prayers included strings of incomprehensible words based on Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean, and Arabic, as well as orthodox Christian liturgy. Practitioners invoked various Christian entities such as angels, saints, Christ and the Virgin Mary"[306] through visions to carry out their desired requests. They

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[302] Unless otherwise quoted, information taken from Frank Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300-1500," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger, The Magic in History Series (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), Claire Fanger, "Plundering the Egyptian Treasure; John the Monk's *Book of Visions* and its Relation to the Ars Notoria of Solomon," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger, The Magic in History Series (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), and Michael Camille, "Visual Art in Two Manuscripts of the Ars Notoria," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger, The Magic in History Series (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998).

[303] Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300-1500," 15.

[304] Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300-1500," 18.

[305] Robert Turner, trans., *Ars Notoria: the notary art of Solomon*, (London: J. Cottrell, 1657), <http://eebo.chadwyck.com>, Early English Books Online, (accessed January 2, 2007), 94-5.

[306] Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300-1500," 18.

considered the names and words of God as having "great Vertue, Power and Efficacy" in this regard.[307]

The *Liber visionum* was recently discovered, bound with the *Ars Notoria* in a late fifteenth-century manuscript originating in Germany.[308] Its author was John, an educated monk, who had condemned and replaced his use of the *artes exceptive* as outlined in the *Ars Notoria* with a new, holy art revealed to him in visions by the Virgin Mary. However, this new art had the same purpose of gaining knowledge of the seven liberal arts. It described thirty prayers he claimed to have been dictated by angels, composed and tested by John and licenced by the Virgin, which could "be understood as ... rung[s] in the ladder that [led] him from earth to heaven or ignorance to knowledge."[309] John addressed six of the prayers to Mary, the Trinity, the angels, and Christ to request salvation through resisting temptation, guarding the soul and receiving divine grace. The text was a practical manual for aspirants wishing to follow John in his ascent through the angelic orders to the court of heaven where they could

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[307] "There is so great Vertue, Power and Efficacy in certain Names and Words of God that when you reade those very Words, it shall immediately increase and help your eloquence, so that you shall be made eloquent of speech by them, and at length attain to the Effects of the powerful sacred Names of God." Turner, *Ars Notoria: the notary art of Solomon,* 5-6.

[308] The first manuscript of the *Liber visionum* dated 1461, possibly from Italy, was discovered in the McMaster University Library. Since then four other copies from Germany or Austria, including the one in Munich, have been unearthed. Nicholas Watson, "John the Monk's *Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undefiled Virgin Mary, Mother of God:* Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger, The Magic in History Series (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), and Claire Fanger, "Medieval Ritual Magic: What It is and Why We Need to Know More About It," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger, The Magic in History Series (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), xv, note 15.

[309] Watson, "John the Monk's *Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undefiled Virgin Mary, Mother of God:* Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text," 170.

be "filled with all wisdom, if not the Beatific Vision itself."[310] Part of his methodology, although unclear, appeared to be instructions for transforming the dream image of the Virgin into the likeness of flesh for the purpose of requesting information. Both Watson and Fanger categorize the *Liber visionum* as ritually oriented; Watson describes it as "a rhetorical religious system, in which devotion is a performative activity ... and virtue is achieved and maintained by ritual means"[311]; Fanger labels the "unconventional focus on ritual practice as a means of obtaining visions," as theurgic.[312]

The last text I will discuss in this genre is *Liber sacer sive juratus*. Klaassen describes it as highly ritualized with a very religious albeit unorthodox focus[313]; Mathiesen calls it a medieval handbook of ceremonial magic written by a single author presenting himself as Honorius of Thebes, son of Euclid.[314] It appears to be an original composition written in Latin in the thirteenth century by someone familiar with the liturgy and ritual of the Roman church. The prologue defended, against attacks by the Pope and Cardinals, the use of magic in the search of truth: "it is not possible that a wicked and unclean man could work truly in this Art; for men are not bound unto spirits, but spirits are constrained against their will to answer clean men and fulfill their requests."[315]

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[310] Watson, "John the Monk's *Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undefiled Virgin Mary, Mother of God:* Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text," 167.
[311] Watson, "John the Monk's *Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undefiled Virgin Mary, Mother of God:* Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text," 168.
[312] Watson, "John the Monk's *Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undefiled Virgin Mary, Mother of God:* Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text," 217.
[313] Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300-1500," 19.
[314] Mathiesen, "A Thirteenth-Century Ritual to Attain the Beatific Vision."
[315] Quoted in Mathiesen, "A Thirteenth-Century Ritual to Attain the Beatific Vision," 148.

While its table of contents listed less noble operations that caused death and destruction, the extant manuscripts describe only two magical operations: one to summon and enlist an angel, spirit, or demon into the service of the practitioner, the other to obtain, at will, a vision of God. The latter is a detailed description of an elaborate ritual lasting twenty-eight days that included ablutions, fasting, repentance and confession of sins, a series of prayers to be repeated at specific times, and hearing mass and receiving the Eucharist daily. It warned the practitioner not to "receive the body of Christ for an evil purpose, for that were death unto him."[316] The ritual on the last day included writing the one hundred Names of God in the ashes surrounding the couch on which the operator was to lie, and repeating a long prayer with such incomprehensible words as "*Zabuather rabarmae iskiros kiros gelon hel tethel nothi imei atethon karex sabaoth sellal chiros opron monigon oriel theos ya*," and such familiar words as "*Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, / Heaven and Earth are Full of Thy glory, /* Hosannah in the highest." After the prayer, it then concluded: "Then sleep and say no more, and you shall see the Celestial Palace, and the Majesty of God in his Glory, and the Nine Orders of Angels, and the company of all Blessed Spirits." [317] Condemnation by theologians did not prevent its popularity with such notables as Johannes Trithemius, Giordano Bruno, and John Dee.

These examples illustrate the wide variety of ways in which Christians attempted to contact and work with the divine, whether through union, knowledge, or

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[316] Mathiesen, "A Thirteenth-Century Ritual to Attain the Beatific Vision," 153.
[317] Quoted in Mathiesen, "A Thirteenth-Century Ritual to Attain the Beatific Vision," 153-4.

vision. They used ritual, both internal and external to travel upwards or bring spiritual entities down. Their guides included Christ, the Virgin Mary, and angels.

In the Jewish World

> Now listen, please, to the words of Job: "In age there is wisdom and prudence in the fullness of time." With similar feelings Rabbi Eleazar, when his master Jochanan kindly said "Come I will teach you something of Merhavah" (works of sublime contemplation), replied: "No, I am not yet a gray-head," meaning, "I am not yet old."[318]
>
> In the commentary on the Book of the Creation, the Kabbalists write: "Our father's teachers were famous angels. Raziel was Adam's."[319]

Richard Kieckhefer suggests that "the ultimate source for all these Christianized versions of magic to gain knowledge is almost certainly Jewish magic used for the same purpose."[320] He bases this comment on a literary tradition that appealed to the 'Prince of the Torah' (*śar ha-torah*) for assistance in mastering the Torah.[321] This tradition was part of the larger *Hekhalot/Merkavah* literary genre[322]

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[318] Reuchlin 1983, 59.

[319] Reuchlin 1983, 69.

[320] Richard Kieckhefer, "The Devil's Contemplatives: The *Liber Iuratus,* The *Liber Visionum* and Christian Appropriation of Jewish Occultism," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger, The Magic in History Series (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 261.

[321] After performing the *Śar-Torah* ritual correctly, Rabbi Ishmael reported: "immediately my heart was enlightened like the gates of the east, and my eyes gazed into the depths and paths of Torah, and never again did I forget anything my ears heard from my teacher, of study; nor would I ever again forget anything of the paths of Torah in which I engaged for their truth." Peter Schäfer, *Synopse Zur Hekhalot-Literatur* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1984), 279; quoted in Michael D. Swartz, "Magical Piety in Ancient and Medieval Judaism," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers Inc., 2001), 180.

[322] Scholem described these literary remains as part of the first phase in the development of Jewish mysticism, traceable from the first century B.C.E. to the tenth C.E.. Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1995), 40. For a succinct overview and brief historiography of this literature see Chapter Two Visionary Ascent and Enthronement in the Hekhalot Literature in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994). Schäfer includes the

grounded in Ezekiel's experience[323] of "immediate contact with God."[324] No longer content with prayer and study of Torah alone, these authors and redactors attempted to build a bridge consisting of seven ascending palaces (*hekhalot*) by which the traveller could access to the divine throne (*merkavah*).

Traffic moved both ways on the bridge for the purpose of obtaining different types of knowledge. The *yored merkavah*[325] might have journeyed upwards[326] in order to contemplate God's glory and the celestial throne, to participate in the heavenly liturgy and then to bring this experience back to the community of Israel.[327] For instance, the *Merkavah Rabbah* claimed that R. Aqiba's journey culminated in a vision of God sitting on His throne of glory.[328] Or the seeker of knowledge might have adjured angels such as the Prince of the Torah or Meṭaṭron downwards.[329] In the *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, R. Yishma'el coerced the angel PDQRM/PRQDS to descend to

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following texts in the Hekhalot literature: *Hekhalot Rabbati, Hekhalot Zutarti, Ma'aseh Merhavah, Merkavah Rabbah* and *3 Enoch.* He states that the inclusion of *Re'uyyot Yehezquel* and *Masekhet Hekhalot* is debatable. Schäfer 1992.

[323] "As I looked, a stormy wind came out of the north: a great cloud with brightness around it and fire flashing forth continually, and in the middle of the fire, something like gleaming amber." Among other things, the vision included a description of the wheels of the chariot, the throne above them, and a vision of God: "seated above the likeness of a throne was something that seemed like a human form .... When I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of someone speaking to me." Ezekiel 1: 4-28.

[324] For Gershom Scholem, immediate contact, rather than becoming one (*unio mystica*) with God, was the *sina qua non* of Jewish mystical experience. "It is this tasting and seeing, however spiritualized it may become, that the genuine mystic desires." Scholem 1995, 4.

[325] The *yored merkavah* was an adept who undertook the dangerous ascent to the divine throne: literally one who descended to the chariot. Schäfer 1992, 2. He did so not only for himself, but also for Israel in order to ensure communication between God and Israel, and to maintain Israel's favoured status. Schäfer 1992, 41, 45.

[326] Some writings referred to this journey as an ascent to the *Merkavah,* and others as a descent, although the description always uses the metaphor of ascent. See Scholem 1995, 47.

[327] Scholem 1995, 46, 56, and Schäfer 1992, 163. See also Wolfson 1994, 82.

[328] Section 686 of *Merkavah Rabbah*; quoted in Schäfer 1992, 118.

[329] Wolfson 1994, 82, and Schäfer 1992, 163, 155-6.

earth in order to reveal to him the '"order of the Torah', that is wisdom."[330] The seeker accomplished or brought about these journeys through preparatory practices, which included fasting, sexual abstinence, ritual baths and prayers,[331] and techniques using the names of God[332] and his angels on seals,[333] in recitation,[334] or by ingestion.[335]

Scholem termed this heavenly journey "a Jewish variation" of second- and third-century Gnostic and Hermetic understandings of redemption: the descent and return of the soul through various spheres of hostile planet-angels and rulers of the cosmos to its divine home filled with God's light. He also speculated on links with Neoplatonic thought.[336] While redemption or knowledge of God in this literature appeared to be a vision of God rather than union, *3 Enoch* recorded the supposed transformation of Enoch, "the prototype of the *Merkavah* mystic," into the angel Meṭaṭron, who sat beside God.[337]

While the *yored merkavah* may have instigated the journey of knowledge, he did so at God's behest. It was God who passionately desired his presence in heaven, and it was God who allowed him to adjure the angels.[338] While he who possessed the Torah might have been, as Schäfer states in his analysis, the "ruler of the world, the

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[330] Section 565 of *Ma'aseh Merkavah*; quoted in Schäfer 1992, 89.

[331] Schäfer 1992, 52.

[332] Composed of variations of the Tetragramaton and *nomina barbara*. Schäfer 1992, 110.

[333] In The *Hekhalot Rabbati* (The Greater Book of Celestial Palaces), the *yored merkavah* showed seals composed of different names of God to the angelic gatekeepers of the seven palaces to gain entrance to God. Schäfer 1992, 33.

[334], R. Yishma'el coerced the angel PDQRM/PRQDS using the forty-two letter name of God. See note 330.

[335] "Write these [names]on myrtle leaves/ on the eve of 'Aṣeret./ When the cock crows one should put the myrtle leaves into his mouth/ and erase them" Section 650 of the *Merkavah Rabbah*; quoted in Schäfer 1992, 110.

[336] Scholem 1995, 48-9.

[337] Wolfson 1994, 83.

[338] Schäfer 1992, 149-50.

order of the cosmos, and thereby God as well,"[339] it was God who gave man this power.

This perception that man had the power to work on God and his creation through human activity intensified in the Jewish medieval esoteric tradition, specifically termed Kabbalah in its narrower sense.[340] The *Zohar*, the most important kabbalistic text of this period, and one of the three most important texts in Judaism,[341] suggested such an idea in the phrase: "the hands of a human being inhabit the height of the world." [342] However, the multi-faceted nature of Kabbalah precludes any definitive answer to the question of the relationship between God, humanity, and work.

Kabbalah drew its ideas from such philosophic sources as Neoplatonism, Hermeticism, and Aristotelianism,[343] such religious sources as Gnosticism, Christianity, and Islam, and of course most directly from Jewish mystical, magical,

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[339] Schäfer 1992, 150.

[340] Seth Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," in *Mystics of the Book: Themes, Topics, and Typologies*, ed. Robert A. Herrara (New York: P. Lang, 1993), 124. In his earlier work, Gershom Scholem described Kabbalah as "the traditional and most commonly used term for the esoteric teachings of Judaism and for Jewish mysticism, especially the forms which it assumed in the Middle Ages from the 12th century onward. In its wider sense it signifies all the successive esoteric movements in Judaism that evolved from the end of the period of the Second Temple and became active factors in Jewish history." Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Dorset Press, 1987), 3.

[341] Next to the Hebrew Bible and the Talmud.

[342] *Zohar* III 186a); quoted in Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 123. The *Zohar* consists of more than a dozen treatises. The main part was written as a midrashic commentary on the five books of the Pentateuch in idiosyncratic Aramaic. It depicted the wanderings of a group of sages led by Rabbi Shimeon bar Yohai and his son Rabbi Eleazar. Although its authorship was attributed to R. Yohai, it seems that thirteenth-century Spanish kabbalist Moses de Leon (1250-1305), a member of the Castilian kabbalist circle, which included Joseph Gikatilla and Joseph of Hamdan, "was the principal author of the main part of the *Zohar*." Joseph Dan, *Kabbalah: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 30. Reuchlin's kabbalist was Simon ben Eleazar, "of the old Jochaicean family." Reuchlin 1983, 43.

[343] Idel *Hasidim* 1995, 50.

and rabbinical thought and traditions.[344] What follows is a small sample of the many ways in which medieval Kabbalah perceived the interaction between God and humanity. First, I will look at what constituted knowledge and then address for what purpose that knowledge was sought and how, acknowledging that these generalizations cannot possibly do justice to the infinite complexity and richness of interpretation that is Kabbalah.[345]

Whereas the *yored merkavah* sought knowledge of God through His presence, the Kabbalist sought knowledge through *devekut* or some form of cleaving or adhesion to God.[346] As Brody points out, this term covers a variety of different experiences in thirteenth-century kabbalistic sources. In Spanish Kabbalist thought, which included the thinking of R. Joseph Gikatilla,[347] "*devekut* was presented as a process of *maḥashavah devekah*, 'consciousness which adheres to Divinity', in which the kabbalistic adept engaged in a contemplative ascent into the Sefirotic realm in order to

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[344] See Scholem 1995 for comments on Gnosticism, and both Scholem and Wolfson 1994 for comments on Jewish sources. For comments on pre-Renaissance Christian influences as well as Muslim thought see Harvey J. Hames, "Exotericism and Esotericism in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," *Esoterica* 6 (2004), and Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century*, The Medieval Mediterranean: Peoples, Economies and Cultures, 400-1453, Editors Hugh Kennedy et al., no. 26 (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

[345] Kabbalists R. Meir ibn Gabbai, R. Shlomo Alquabetz and R. Moses Cordovero suggested that "each and every Jew is in the possession of a special revelation and of a unique interpretation disclosed only to him." Idel 2002, 96. See also note 29.

[346] For a brief summary of its root, and biblical and rabbinical sources see Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah,", 133-4. Scholem argues that while *devekut* implies some sort of union, "a sense of beatitude and intimate union", it does not "entirely eliminate the distance between the creature and its Creator." Scholem 1987, 174-76. See also Scholem 1995, 123. However Brody notes that "Scholem's model of *devekut* has been extensively critiqued by Ephraim Gottleib and Moshe Idel over the past three decades. Both have demonstrated convincingly that Scholem's discussion fails to adequately describe the richness of spiritual experience evidenced by thirteenth century Kabbalistic literature (136)." See Chapter 3: Varieties of Devekut in Jewish Mysticism in Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988). See also Wolfson's comments on Abulafia's conception of union in Elliot R. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia - Kabbalist and Prophet, Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy* (Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2000), 6.

[347] Major kabbalistic source used by Reuchlin.

unite his thought and volition with their supernal counterparts, Divine Wisdom or *Ḥokhmah*, and Will or *Keter*."[348] The anonymous author of the *Iggeret ha-Kodesh*, a text on sexual ethics, captured this idea in the following passage:

> As for [Solomon's] statement 'Know Him'; you already know the meaning of the term 'knowledge', that it is the conjunction of the rational soul and its adhesion to the supernal light. As the union of a man and a woman is called knowledge, so too is the adhesion of the soul with the World of the Intellect called knowledge, as a person is not said to know a particular thing until the intelligizer adheres to the intelligible.[349]

This perception of knowledge as intellectual union appeared to derive its conception of *devekut* from Aristotelian terminology in which the knower and the known, or the intellect and the intelligible became one in the act of knowing. For instance, Kabbalist Abraham Abulafia, whose thinking was extremely influential among early modern Christian thinkers, used this language in his discussion of union as the transformation of the human intellect into the divine *intellectus agens* and from there perhaps into God.[350] Before him, R. Azriel of Gerona wrote: "Say to Wisdom, you are my sister; namely to cleave [human] thought to *Ḥokhmah*,[351] so that she and it [become] one entity."[352]

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[348] Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 134. Ḥokhmah and Keter are two of the ten *Sefirot,* the metaphysical tool that Kabbalists used to discuss God.

[349] Quoted in Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 144.

[350] Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 5-6.

[351] In this instance, the sefirah symbolizes one of the inner manifestations of God.

[352] From R. ʿAzriel's *Commentary on the Talumdic Aggadot*, 20; quoted in Idel *New Perspectives* 1988, 46.

As well as Aristotelian thought, Moshe Idel delineates two more sources of *devekut* terminology, and how they were reflected in kabbalistic thinking.[353] The Neoplatonic concept of the soul with its root in a higher source (universal soul or God) led to a focus on ascent or return of the soul as the central unitive experience. Italian Kabbalist R. Menaḥem ben Benjamin Recanati[354] wrote:

> When the pious and the men of deeds [engaged in a state of mental] concentration, and were involved in supernal mysteries, they imagined, by the power of their thought, as if these things were engraved before them, and when they linked their soul to the supernal soul, these things were increased and expanded and revealed themselves ... as when he cleaved his soul to the supernal soul,[355] these awesome things were engraved in his heart.[356]

Theurgical sources,[357] which Idel sees as focused on the descent of spiritual entities into statues or the practitioner, were reflected in a two part understanding of *devekut*. The practitioner's contemplative ascent and union with God "spark[ed] a downward surge of creative energy from Keter into the *Sefirot* and the cosmos, which [were then] channeled into the natural order via the meditative concentration of the Kabbalistic adept."[358] In *Sha'arei Orah*, Gikatilla wrote: "By means of this prayer, properly performed, all the *Sefirot* are united and an overflow (*shefa*) drawn forth from above to below."[359]

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[353] Information on the three main sources of *devekut* terminology taken from Idel *New Perspectives* 1988, 39-58.

[354] An influential source on Pico.

[355] Idel states that the "supernal soul" stands for the Neoplatonic "universal soul."

[356] From Recanati's *Commentary on Pentateuch* fol. 38b; quoted in Idel *New Perspectives* 1988, 43.

[357] Idel describes these as "an undefined corpus of speculative writings, including Neoplatonic and Hermetic treatises, with strong magical interests." Idel *New Perspectives* 1988, 40.

[358] Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 134, 138.

[359] Quoted in Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 148. Wolfson delineates a similar idea in the thought of Abulafia: "The human intellect plays an active role in unifying God through the ten separate

Like the *yored merkavah*, the kabbalist sought knowledge of God for a variety of reasons. Wolfson states that in the earliest kabbalistic documents, the goal was "to receive the secret of the name, that is, to cleave to YHWH."[360] Brody adds to this "the attainment of union with God, mediation for one's fellows, or the unification of the *Sefirot*,"[361] and interprets the journey of the thirteenth-century Kabbalist as a two step process of personal and cosmic salvation. Through the ascent and union of human consciousness/mind/will with God, the Kabbalist thought he was opening up the channel through which the divine energy and blessings could flow within both the Sefirotic pleroma and the material world.[362] Other objectives were knowledge of the Torah and future events, and the ability to prophesy.[363] Alemanno[364] was interested in using the power of *gnōsis* for more materialistic ends. He wrote that Moses illustrated this ability to direct the divine influx to create anything he wished. "Whenever he wished to perform signs and wonders, Moses would pray and utter divine names, words, and meditations, until he intensified those emanations. The emanations then descended into the world and created new supranatural things. With that, Moses split the sea, opened up the earth and the like."[365]

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intellects. That is, by becoming one with the Active Intellect through conjunction, the individual unifies the divine overflow of all ten intellects within the Active Intellect, which in a manner of speaking represents the unification of God." Wolfson 2000, 218.

[360] Wolfson 2005, 209.

[361] Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 137. This reflects a kabbalistic view that not only humanity, but also God had fallen from the state of unity that marked the beginning of creation.

[362] Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 131-2, 136, 151.

[363] Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 138.

[364] Influential in early modern Italian Kabbalistic thought.

[365] From MS Oxford 2234, fol 8b; quoted in Idel *NewPerspectives* 1988, 204. See 268-9, and Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance."

Moses used the techniques of prayer, divine names, words, and meditation to work with the Divine. Kabbalists did as well. Before moving to a discussion of external techniques, internal processes, and the *mitzvot,* I highlight the fact that the Jewish understanding of the Hebrew language as God's tool of creation, and Torah as the embodiment of this creation, underpinned these techniques. Idel begins *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation* with a quote from Kabbalist R. Moses Cordovero: "The entire Torah is not [embodied] in the world/ But the entire world is Torah."[366] Concluding his first chapter entitled "The World Absorbing Text," Idel writes: "the rabbinic and Kabbalistic authors lived within a conceptual framework in which the book preceded the emergence of the world, which may be no more than one small aspect of the comprehensive book."[367] The *Sefer Yetzirah,* the Book of Creation,[368] begins with letters and the names of God: "By means of thirty-two wonderful paths of wisdom,[369] YH, YHVH of Hosts, ELOHIM of Israel, Living ELOHIM, and Eternal King, EL SHADDAI, Merciful and Gracious, High and Uplifted, Who inhabits Eternity, exalted and holy is His Name, engraved. And He created His universe by three principles: by border and letter and number."[370]

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[366] From *Shi'ur Qomah*; quoted in Idel 2002, 26.

[367] Idel 2002, 44.

[368] This is an anonymous work whose dating is disputed. However, it appears to be part of the *Merkavah/Hekhalot* tradition. Dan writes: "One of the most important sources for medieval kabbalistic terminology is an ancient non-kabbalistic treatise entitled *Sefer Yezira* (The Book of Creation). It is often regarded, erroneously, as the earliest work of the Kabbalah. In fact, *Sefer Yezira* is a cosmological, scientific treatise that describes the process of creation mainly by the power of the letters of the alphabet, and presents an early Jewish conception of grammar." Dan 2006, 15-16.

[369] These refer to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the numbers one to ten.

[370] In Hebrew, the last three words are *sefer, sefer* and *sefer* or *sefar, sefer* and *sippur.* The last three words can be translated in many ways: for instance book, book, book; limit, book, language; narration, counting, sequence. Taken from Dr. Francis Landy's translation of Abulafia's *Commentary on Sefer Yetsirah.* Each Hebrew letter has a number associated with it; this relationship plays an important role in techniques for contacting God. Translation of the first verse taken from "Sefer

Letters and language were the principal means of contacting and knowing God.[371] According to one late thirteenth-century Kabbalist, the shapes of all the letters of the Torah were the shape of God.[372] Hence contemplation on or manipulation of the letters could facilitate knowledge. For instance, the seeker could use the letters as a meditative tool by visualizing each shape, and concentrating on its symbolic connection with a particular *Sefirah.*[373] He could manipulate them using such techniques as *gematria, notariacon,* and *themurah*[374] to induce ecstatic trance.

Abulafia was a prime proponent of this method. He wrote:

> And begin to combine small letters with great ones, to reverse them and to permutate them rapidly, until your heart shall be warmed through their combinations and rejoice in their movements and in what you bring about through their permutations; and when you feel thusly that your heart is already greatly heated through combinations ... then you are ready to receive the emanated influx.[375]

In preparation for this ritual, the practitioner was to purify both his body and his soul, don clean white garments, *ṭallit* (prayer shawl) and *tefillin* (phylacteries), and perform the ritual in a lonely house at night.[376] In his Path of Names, consisting of seven steps

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Yetsira," in *Understanding Jewish Mysticism: A Source Reader, The Merkabah Tradition and The Zoharic Tradition,* ed. David R. Blumenthal, The Library of Judaic Learning, Series Editor Jacob Neusner, no. 2 (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1978), 15. See also Idel's discussion on language and the letters as the constitutive elements of creation. Moshe Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," in *Mysticism and Language,* ed. Steven T. Katz (NewYork: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[371] "The letters are understood to constitute a mesocosmos that enables operations that can bridge the gap between the human – or the material – and the divine." Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," 43.

[372] Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," 49.

[373] Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," 66.

[374] See note 467 for an explanation of these terms.

[375] From *Ḥayyê ha-'Olam ha-Ba,* MS. Oxford 1582, fol52a; quoted in Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia,* trans. Jonathan Chipman, SUNY Series in Judaica: *Hermeneutics, Mysticism and Religion,* Series Editors Michael Fishbane, Robert Goldenberg, and Arthur Green (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1988), 39.

[376] Idel *Mystical Experience* 1988, 38-9, and Wolfson 2000, 209

that led towards knowledge of God and prophecy, Abulafia placed the combination of names above contemplation on the ten *sefirot*.[377]

The techniques of letter permutation favoured by Abulafia first came to prominence in the literature of the *Hasidim*.[378] They made particular use of the Divine names, especially the tetragrammaton, and prayer as techniques to reach the Divine. Wolfson summarizes R.Eleazar of Worm's description of the power of the Name: "the one who possesses knowledge of the name is transformed into an angelic being and thus receives passage through the heavenly realms until his soul is bound to the throne."[379] This knowledge of the name was to be transmitted orally master to disciple through a ritual of purification involving water immersion, donning white clothes, and uttering specific blessings.[380] Prayer as an intricate liturgy rather than a spontaneous practice was "likened to Jacob's ladder extended from the earth to the sky" by means of which the soul could ascend to the heavens. Gikatilla captured this idea in *Sha'arei Orah*: "a person must concentrate in his prayer and ascend from *Sefirah* to *Sefirah* and Desire to Desire, until he arrive[d] in his consciousness to the source of that Supernal Desire called infinity."[381] Jacob ben Asher (d. before 1340), whose father came to

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[377] See Idel *Ecstatic Kabbalah* 1988, viii, Scholem 1995, 143, Scholem 1995, 140, and Hames 2000, 63-4.

[378] Scholem 1995, 100. The Hasidim movement lasted from 1150 to 1250, was centred in the Rhineland, and all its leaders came from the Kalonymides family: Samuel the Hasid, his son Jehudah of Worms who died in Regensburg in 1217, and the latter's disciple and relative Eleazar ben Jehudah of Worms (d. ca 1223-1232). Scholem 1995, 81-2. Idel calls them "the main heirs of *Heikhalot* mysticism", preserving and perhaps redacting their texts, and continuing their practices. Idel *New Perspectives* 1988, 91.

[379] Wolfson 1994, 236.

[380] Wolfson 1994, 238-9.Wolfson notes that "the techniques adduced by Eleazar were not entirely his innovation, but were based on longstanding traditions in Jewish esoteric literature regarding the necessary praxis for uttering the divine name" (241).

[381] Quoted in Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 148.

Spain from Germany, reported that "the German *Hasidim* were in the habit of counting or calculating every word in the prayers, benedictions and hymns, and they sought a reason in the Torah for the number of words in the prayers."[382]

Eleazar's writings contained another set of techniques, reminiscent of the Hermetic passages on statue making, on how to make a golem. It appeared that in its original conception, the golem or homunculus appeared to its creator during ecstatic states of consciousness produced through contemplation on the mysteries of the alphabet. In this early stage, its life lasted only as long as the ecstatic state.[383]

Rituals involving golem-making and letter permutation stood outside of halakhic practice, or classical rabbinic explanations of how to implement the *mitzvot* or six hundred and thirteen commandments that the Torah stipulated each Jew should (positive) or should not (negative) perform. Although interpreting their meaning differently from orthodox rabbinic tradition, the performance of what Wolfson calls the ritualistic core of traditional Judaism[384] remained central to kabbalistic practice. Through *kavvanah*, intention or intense concentration, Kabbalists transformed their performance into a technique for achieving personal and cosmic salavation. For Abulafia "they facilitate[d] the knowledge of the divine names, which eventuate[d] in the mystical experience of union." For the author of the *Zohar*, the performance of the

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[382] Quoted in Scholem 1995, 100.

[383] Scholem 1995, 99. He continues: "It was only later that popular legend attributed to the Golem an existence outside the ecstatic consciousness, and in later centuries a whole group of legends sprang up around such Golem figures and their creators." The tradition of the *golem* can be traced to two non-kabbalistic commentaries on the *Sefer Yetzirah* written in early thirteenth-century Germany. "They include a section that describes, in detail, how the theory of the alphabet presented in the ancient work [could] be utilized to create a living human being out of earth, breathing life into it by certain methods of reciting the Hebrew letters." This story was supported in a number of medieval and early modern texts, and was (and is) associated with Kabbalah. Dan 2006, 105-8.

[384] Wolfson 2000, 227-8.

commandments brought the Sefirot into harmony by linking the heavenly and earthly body. He asserted: "All the mitzvot of the Torah are united with the body of the King, some with the head, some with the torso, some with the hands of the King, some with the feet. None exists beyond the body of the King."[385]

Two late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century kabbalists, R. Joseph of Hamadan, and R. Menahem Recanati, emphasized the relationship between contemplation and theurgy. R.Joseph suggested that the performance of the commandments was theurgically effective because of the similarities between the Torah, the human body, and the divine ten *sefirot*. Contemplation of the Torah enabled contemplation of the divine form. [386] Inspired by Joseph of Hamadan's circle,[387] Recanati made this relationship explicit: "It is incumbent upon man to contemplate the commandments of the Torah, [to see] how many worlds he maintains by their performance and how many worlds he destroys by their neglect."[388]

Such an understanding of the *mitzvot* raises the questions of who is working on whom, and whose will is being done. In the Jewish world human action, whether it was prayer, concentration, contemplation, or ritual, enabled man not only to bridge the gap between the natural and the supernatural world, but also to bring about changes in both these worlds. Ultimately however, it was God who provided the tools of salvation, as Abulafia explicated in *Sefer ha-Melis* :

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[385] John Corrigan et al., *Jews, Christians, Muslims: A Comparative Introduction to Monotheistic Religions* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1998), 286.

[386] Idel 2002, 73.

[387] Idel 2002, 122. Recanati wrote the introduction to Hamadan's *Commentary on the Rationales of the Commandments.*

[388] Idel 2002, 74.

> And now the Lord shall restore our fortunes and He desires to have mercy upon us for the sake of His holy name, and He began to reveal to Raziel some of the knowledge of His names, blessed be He, and He opened the eyes of his heart to them, and he instructed him with regard to them about intelligible and received words, and He commanded him to write something of the wondrous matters, some of then explicit, some of them allusive, and some of them concealed, as it was in the beginning.[389]

In the Early Modern World

In this section I will look at three men, two Christian and one Jewish, who lived in or had connections with Florence and whose methodologies of contact influenced *DAC* indirectly through the milieu within which *DAC* was written, and directly through familiarity with their works. Again, it is not my purpose to look at the origins of or influences on the ideas of these men, except to note the obvious: that the previous thinkers and works I have mentioned influenced them. Instead I will again examine the way in which these three men perceived the relationship between the material and the non-material worlds, and how they sought to work with that relationship.

The intellectual climate of Lorenzo de Medici's Florence was one of curiosity and openness, fuelled by the translation of two major corpora, Ficino's translations of the Greek Neoplatonic and Hermetic texts, and Flavius Mithridates',[390] and to a much

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[389] MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 17a; quoted in Wolfson 2000, 55.

[390] Nissim Abu Faraj, who took the name Guiglemo Raymund Moncada alias Flavius Mithridates, learned ecstatic Kabbalah as a Jew in Sicily. Idel speculates that Mithridates may have carried Hebrew manuscripts from Sicily to Rome, where he converted to Christianity. Moshe Idel, "Jewish Mystical Thought in the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico," in *La Cultura Ebraica All'Epoca Di Lorenzo Il Magnifico: Celebrazioni Del V Centenario Della Morte Di Lorenzo Il Magnifico*, ed. Dora Liscia Bemporad and Ida Zatelli (Firenze: L.S. Olschki, 1998), 21. Mithridates translated some of Abulafia's books and those of his followers into Latin. Idel notes "the great amount of Abulafian material in the general economy of Mithridates' translations, and the high quality of those Latin translations." Moshe Idel, "The Ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia in Sicily and its Transmission

lesser extent Rabbi Eliahu del Medigo's, translations of Hebrew kabbalistic and philosophic texts.[391] Abu Bakher ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and al- Baṭalyawsī's *Book of Imaginary Circles* were also influential in intellectual circles. These texts formed the basis of a lively interaction among Christian and Jewish scholars, including Jewish apostates such as Mithridates and Paul Ricci.[392]

Marsilio Ficino

Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) was a priest and an intellectual with a strong interest in medicine.[393] He headed Cosimo de' Medici's Platonic Academy in Florence, and under Cosimo's patronage, he translated Plato, the Neoplatonic works (chiefly Iamblichus, Proclus, Synesius, and Psellus), and the *Corpus Hermeticum*. He was interested in efficacious medical cures, which he believed could be found in the occult properties of material objects like stones. The third book of *De vita libri tres*,[394] *De vita coelitus comparanda*, attempted to develop a theory that would explain these

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during the Renaissance," in *Italia Judaica: Gli Ebrei in Sicilia Sino All'Espulsione Del 1492: Atti Del V Convegno Internazionale, Palermo, 15-19 Giugno 1992*, vol. 32, Pubblicazioni degli archivi di Stato, Saggi (Rome: Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1995), 337. Pico was highly influenced by his translations. See Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico Della Mirandola's Encounter With Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1989).

[391] Idel, "Jewish Mystical Thought in the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico," 19.

[392] See also Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 187, and Moshe Idel, "Particularism and Universalism in Kabbalah," in *Essential Papers on Jewish Culture in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, ed. David Ruderman (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

[393] His father had been a physician and apparently a favourite of Cosimo de' Medici.

[394] *De vita* was a medical work; it announced itself as "the first treatise on how to be an intellectual and keep your health." Kaske and Clark 1989, 4. Walker summarizes the three books succinctly: "the first [dealt] with preserving the life of scholars, the second with prolonging their life, and the third with the astral influences on them." Walker 1975, 3. Copenhaver describes *De vita coelitus comparanda* (*DVCC*) as "arguably the most significant statement on magic written in the Renaissance." Brian P. Copenhaver, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance," in *Hermeticism and the Renaissance: Intellectual History and the Occult in Early Modern Europe*, ed. I. Merkel and A. G. Debus (Washington: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1988), 80.

occult properties in accordance with Church orthodoxy.[395] In it, he discussed the relationship between heavenly bodies and spirits, and the material world.

Assuming that the natural and supernatural worlds interacted with each other, Ficino attempted to explain the medium through which celestial forces entered the world, and how humanity could benefit from these forces. He theorized that there were two bridges between the worlds: one an impersonal and automatic force, the *spiritus mundi*, and one an intelligent mediator – daemons both good and evil.[396] Using the Neoplatonic concept of "signs" and "tokens," he postulated that there were certain objects "whose resemblance to higher entities [gave] them the 'disposition' toward which higher powers will proceed of their own."[397] *DVCC* contained lists of these objects that could be used to attract desired forces. For instance, drawing from Proclus, Ficino suggested that the lion, laurel, and sun-stone were directly connected to the solar energy of the sun.[398]

Celenza suggests that Ficino cast himself in the role of hierophant, perhaps influenced by Iamblichus' interpretation of Pythagoras as a soteriological figure "sent

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[395] He didn't succeed. Although the evidence is scanty, he appeared to have been charged with some sort of heresy after the publication of *De vita*. Fortunately, his friends interceded with Pope Innocent VIII and saved him from these charges.

[396] He did not equate daemons with the Christian concept of demons as the minions of the Devil, but with the Greek idea of daemons as supernatural entities existing between the gods and man. "The Greek 'daimon' might generally be described, however, as a force, or energy, less potent than that of 'theos', or God, but far more so than that of humans." Valerie Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark, Witchcraft and Magic in Europe, Series Editors Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999) 281. Daemons could be either good or evil. For a fuller explanation of Ficino's theory, and his attempts to remain within the boundary of orthodoxy, see Kaske and Clark 1989, Walker 1975, and Brian P. Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the De Vita of Marsilio Ficino," *Renaissance Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (1984).

[397] Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the De Vita of Marsilio Ficino," 551.

[398] Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the De Vita of Marsilio Ficino," 551.

down from the train of Apollo to save men's souls."[399] Like Pythagoras, Ficino saw religion and philosophy as an integrated whole. He wrote in another of his works, the *Theologia Platonica*, "Providence has also decreed that those who have impiously made too great a separation between the study of philosophy and holy religion should at some point come to recognize that they have erred ...."[400] Similar to Proclus, he felt that through knowledge of the world one could know the Power that had "created and vitalized" it.[401] Similar to Iamblichus, he believed that the Divine had provided the material means to propel the soul upwards, if used properly in ritual.[402] Reminiscent of ancient theurgical practices, he advocated a ritual approach, which included purification, singing, and dancing. Touissant describes his practice as a "theurgy of descending *pneuma* and that of ascending prayers." [403]

Pico della Mirandola

Pico also believed that ancient, non-Christian, as well as Christian writings contained the keys to knowledge of God and salvation.[404] For Pico, the "final perfection," or salvation was divinization or union. In the opening statement with which he had intended to begin the debate on his *Nine Hundred Theses*, he wrote:

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[399] Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism," 81.
[400] Quoted in Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism," 86.
[401] Copenhaver, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance," 87.
[402] Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism," 89.
[403] Toussaint, "Ficino's Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy?: A Note on *Spiritus*, the *Three Books on Life*, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza," 29.
[404] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, trans. A. R. Caponigri (Chicago: Retnery Gateway, 1956), 15.

"And at last ... we shall be, no longer ourselves, but the very One who made us."[405] According to Pico, magic transformed that which was separate into that which was one. Ansani interprets Pico's thirteenth-magical conclusion as magic "bring[ing] together the two separate worlds of heaven and earth."[406]

In Pico's mind, one ascended to God on the ladder of knowledge. The first rung was moral philosophy used to "restrain the unreasoning drives of the protean brute," the next rung dialectical reasoning to "compose the disorders of reason," then natural philosophy to "reduce the conflict of opinions and endless debates," and finally "the queen of the sciences, most holy theology"[407] to bring our "purified souls" to "final perfection"[408] and perfect knowledge[409] where "no veil of images" interposed itself between "the glory of divinity" and he who reached the top of the ladder.[410]

Pico's methodology incorporated philosophy, contemplation, magic and his interpretation of Kabbalah. He wrote in the Oration:

> If, however, you see a philosopher, judging and distinguishing all things according to the rule of reason, him shall you hold in veneration, for he is a creature of heaven and not earth; if, finally, a pure contemplator, unmindful of the body, wholly withdrawn into the inner chambers of the mind, here indeed is neither a creature of earth nor a heavenly creature, but some higher divinity, clothed with human flesh."[411]

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[405] Pico della Mirandola 1956, 27.

[406] Antonella Ansani, "Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola's Language of Magic," in *L'Hébreu Au Temps De La Renaissance*, ed. Ilana Zinguer, Jewish Studies, no. 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 91. "To operate magic is nothing other than to marry the world." Magical Conclusion 13: Farmer 1998, 499.

[407] Pico della Mirandola 1956, 20-1.

[408] Pico della Mirandola 1956, 16.

[409] Idel, "Jewish Mystical Thought in the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico," 21.

[410] Pico della Mirandola 1956, 24-5.

[411] Pico della Mirandola 1956, 10-11.

He declared not only that magic was the practical part of natural science or philosophy, the next to last rung on the ladder to perfect knowledge, but also the noblest part.[412] Highest of all was Cabala; no magical operation could be efficacious without a work of Cabala, and no magic could attain what "pure and immediate Cabala" could.[413] While Pico considered magic and Cabala as closely related, he did not see them as exactly the same. Magic operated within the natural world, Cabala operated above it.[414] Hence Cabala was the "highest part of natural magic."[415]

Assani argues that the magical signs at the core of Pico's magic were numbers and letters, and that "[i]n a somewhat convoluted way, Pico [was] quite clear in establishing the use of letters as common denominator between magic and the Cabala."[416] Other magical techniques appeared to include singing Orphic hymns, which were useful in exciting the minds of contemplatives.[417] The second of the thirty-one conclusions on 'The Magic in the Orphic Hymns' seemed to imply that this

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[412] Ansani, "Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola's Language of Magic," 90.

[413] Magical Conclusion 15: "No magical operation can be of any efficacy unless it has annexed to it a work of Cabala, explicit or implicit."
Magical Conclusion 26: "Just as through the influence of the first agent, if that influence is individual and immediate, something is achieved that is not attained through the mediation of causes, so through a work of Cabala, if it is the pure and immediate Cabala, something is achieved to which no magic attains." Farmer 1998, 499, 503. See also Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 197, and Yates 1991, 93-107.

[414] Magical Conclusion 14: "If there is any nature immediate to us that is either simply rational, or at least exists for the most part rationally, it has magic in its summit, and through its participation in men can be more perfect."
Conclusion 17: "Magic is proper to the nature of that which is the horizon of time and eternity, from whence it should be sought through due modes known to the wise."
Conclusion 18: "The nature of that which is the horizon of temporal eternity is next to the *magus,* but above him, and proper to it is the Cabala."
Conclusion 26: see note 413. Farmer 1998, 499-503.

[415] Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," 125.

[416] Ansani, "Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola's Language of Magic," 97.

[417] Farmer 1998, 505.

singing was part of a larger ritual.[418] As well, voices and words, especially those that meant nothing, were efficacious in magical work. However, he felt only Hebrew names or those derived from Hebrew were powerful.[419]

Although the work of knowing or becoming one with God began with the seeker, again it appeared that the culmination of the work could only occur at God's behest. Writing in extremely flowery and metaphorical terms, Pico talked about God bestowing peace upon, summoning, inviting, and descending to the soul.[420] God sent both Christ and angels to assist humanity, Christ was "the true Mediator"[421] by whom man could be united with God, and God also sent angels "to procure the good and salvation of man alone."[422]

Rabbi Yohanan Alemanno

Moshe Idel distinguishes between the development of Kabbalah in Spain and its development in Italy. He states that, unlike their Spanish counterparts, Italian Kabbalists were not only more open to cross-religious/cultural discussion, but also emphasized aspects that resonated with the religious, philosophic, and magical thought

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[418] "Nothing is more effective in natural magic than the Orphic hymns, if there is added the due music, intention of the soul, and other circumstances known to the wise." Farmer 1998, 505.

[419] Magical Conclusion 20: "Every voice has power in magic insofar as it is shaped by the voice of God."

Magical Conclusion 21: "Voices that mean nothing are more powerful in magic than voices that mean something. And anyone who is profound can understand the reason for this conclusion from the preceding conclusion."

Magical Conclusion 22: "No names that mean something, insofar as those names are singular and taken per se, can have power in a magical work, unless they are Hebrew names, or closely derived from Hebrew." Farmer 1998, 501.

[420] Pico della Mirandola 1956, 21-4.

[421] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Heptaplus* (Discourse on the seven days of creation), with introduction, glossary, translation by Jessie B. McGaw (New York: Philosophical Library, 1977), 87.

[422] Pico della Mirandola 1977, 56.

of Christian scholars.[423] Rather than emphasizing the ability of man to restore the harmony of God through the performance of the *mitzvot*, Italian Kabbalists focused on the apprehension of the divine emanation through the intellect. Rather than speculating on the divine inner structures of God, they concerned themselves with ritual techniques for knowing God.[424] Language was important not for its semantic meaning but for its non-semantic use in inducing ecstatic experiences through various manipulatory techniques.[425] These ritual techniques to obtain knowledge of God fit very well with Christian notions of human agency and ritual as effective means of influencing the supernatural. In addition, apostates such as Flavius Mithridates and Paul Ricci made these works even more approachable with translations that appeared to support Christian teachings such as the Trinity.

Alemanno (born ca. 1435) exemplified this emphasis on man rather than God as the focus of ritual work. He wrote that through ritual "man shall prepare his intellect, soul and Torah in such a way as to receive wisdom, knowledge and enlightenment."[426] Idel suggests that, in Alemanno's thinking, the Kabbalah "was transformed from speculation upon the mysteries of the divinity as an end in itself into a sophisticated means of exerting human influence superior to astrology or magic."[427]

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[423] See for example Idel, "Particularism and Universalism in Kabbalah," and Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance."

[424] For a discussion of the various schools of thought within Kabbalah, see Idel *New Perspectives* 1988, Idel 2002, and Idel "Particularism and Universalism in Kabbalah." For a different perspective see Wolfson 2000, Wolfson 1994, and Wolfson 2005, especially Chapter Five "Flesh Become Word."

[425] See note 467.

[426] From *Shaar ha-Ḥeshek,* f.33b; quoted in Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 207.

[427] Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 202.

According to Alemanno, kabbalistic rituals were efficacious because they drew on the "pure spiritual forces" emanating from the *Sefirot*, rather than the "impure spiritual forces"[428] of such entities as the cosmic soul, angels, stars, or planets,[429] and they were performed to fulfill divine will.[430]

Alemanno considered this reception of divine emanation or efflux[431] as a two step process. [432] After spiritual and material purifications and reading of the divine names from the Torah scroll, the Kabbalist received the first pulse of power. This emanation revealed "awesome secrets" and "divine visions," and prepared him for a more powerful efflux:

> When he immerses himself in these things, then such a great efflux will come to him that he will be able to cause the spirit of God to descend upon him and hover above him and flutter about him all the day. Not only that, but 'the writing of God, the spirit of the living God' will descend upon the scroll to such a degree that the scroll will give him power to work signs and wonders in the world.[433]

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[428] Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 205.

[429] Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 196.

[430] Idel *Hasidim* 1995, 67. See also Idel *New Perspectives* 1988, 269.

[431] In his explanation of the Tabernacle and Temple as "a sort of great talisman which enabled the Jews to receive the divine emanations of the Sefirot," Alemanno wrote, "For the people were educated to believe in the possibility of causing spiritual forces and emanations to descend from above by means of preparations made by man for that purpose, such as talismans, garments, foods and special objects intended to cause the descent of spiritual forces, just as when Moses our master, peace be with him, prepared the golden calf." Oxford MS 2234, f. 22v.; quoted in Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 203.

[432] Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 197-9, 200-1.

[433] From Alemanno's *Collectanaea* Oxford MS 2234, f. 164r; quoted in Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 199.

These emanations benefited not only the individual, but also the material world; the descent of the powers of Love and Compassion caused "the power of impurity and strict judgement to pass away from the earth."[434]

Similar to earlier thinkers, Alemanno challenged philosophers who questioned his kabbalistic path to wisdom and intellectual union through "magical actions, buildings, vessels, prayers, vain things and many dreams, things which [were] unfounded in the eyes of philosophers, the men of intellect and reason." He deferred to the authority of the ancients "who knew the nature of the existing beings, the relations between them, the way in which they are linked with one another and how to prepare a receptacle for the reception of the influence of the superior bodies."[435]

Although emphasizing ritual techniques designed to bring divine efflux downwards, Alemanno was also concerned with the movement of the soul upwards. Angels descended upon the ladder of the Universal Soul, which Idel suggests Alemanno also allegorized as nature, "in order to direct the world." At the same time souls ascended upon it to reach God.[436] Alemanno also organized different types of knowledge into a hierarchical scheme based on their ability to bring man closer to God. For example, he suggested that Averroism[437] allowed union between man and the

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[434] From Paris MS 849, f. 137v; quoted in Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 207.

[435] *Sha'ar ha-Hesheq* (Halberstadt, Ger., 1860) fol. 34b; MS Oxford-Bodleiana 1535, fol. 106a, b.; quoted in Moshe Idel, "Man as the "Possible" Entity in some Jewish and Renaissance Sources," in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Alison P. Coudert and Jeffrey S. Shoulson, Jewish Culture and Contexts, Series Editor David B. Ruderman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 42.

[436] Moshe Idel, "The Ladder of Ascension - The Reverberations of a Medieval Motif in the Renaissance," in *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. Isadore Twersky, vol. 2 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984), 85.

[437] "Averroes, the twelfth-century Muslim commentator on Aristotle, exercised a strong influence on Latin scholastics from about 1230 onwards (see Ibn Rushd). Around 1270, the derogatory

lowest spiritual intellect – the Agent Intellect, while the kabbalistic teachings of Rabbi Isaac ibn Latif and Abulafia permitted union with entities higher than the Agent Intellect.[438]

Alemanno was another syncretic thinker who brought together disparate sources in his interpretation of Kabbalah: Jewish, Hermetic, Neoplatonic, Aristotelian, and Arabic. Texts with which he was familiar, or used, included the *Picatrix*, the *Sefer Raziel*, the *Liber Clavicula Salomonis (Sefer Mafte'aḥ Shlomo)*, *Sefer ha-Tamar,* the *Sefer Pil'ot Olam (The Wonders of the World)* attributed to Albertus Magnus, books by Recanati and Abulafia, Asheknzi writings including those of Rabbi Eleazar, and the *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* and *Book of Imaginary Circles*.[439] Through Pico, he influenced Reuchlin's understanding of Kabbalah.[440]

Conclusion

As this brief overview has illustrated, the techniques designed to fulfill a believer's need to contact his gods, and the ways in which god and man worked together were many and varied, as were the terms used to describe the interaction. These different methodologies all claimed knowledge of how to contact and perhaps use a higher power.

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term Averroistae ([too ardent] followers of Averroes) began to be used, principally to characterize adherents of the view that there is only one shared human intellect." *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. "Averroism", http://www.rep.routledge.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/article/B012SECT1, (accessed March 30 2007).

[438] Idel, "Jewish Mystical Thought in the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico," 28.

[439] Idel, "Jewish Mystical Thought in the Florence of Lorenzo il Magnifico," 33-5.

[440] As well as articles already cited, see Wirszubski 1989, 256, and Klaus Herrmann, "The Reception of Hekhalot-Literature in Yohanan Alemanno's Autograph MS Paris 849," in *Studies in Jewish Manuscripts*, ed. Joseph Dan et al. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 75.

Why did the practitioner want to establish contact and work with the supernatural? The practitioner sought contact to obtain knowledge and salvation. He wanted to know how to wield spiritual power in order to bring about some type of salvation: salvation of the soul through a vision of or union with God, salvation of the body through the ability to alter one's material situation, or salvation of the earth or of God through restoration of harmony. Ultimately the seeker wanted to know how to control his destiny.

With whom was the practitioner attempting to work and whose will was being done? The practitioner might have been trying to work with an intermediary entity such as celestial rays and planetary bodies, daemons, angels, gods, demi-gods, or directly with God. While the practitioner instigated and often compelled contact, it was always God's will that directed the actions.

In what direction did the participants journey? Contact might occur either in heaven or on earth. The practitioner might bring gods or efflux or emanations downwards, or he might travel upwards to particular points in the supernatural hierarchy, but always questing to finish the journey in the presence of God.

How did the practitioner work with the supernatural? The practitioner used activity, both external or physical and internal or mental, and often employed the assistance of a mediator. These practices were called sacraments, magic, ritual, meditation, prayer, or contemplation.

I have attempted to show that there were many answers to the why, who, where and how of working with the Divine. What did *DAC* have to say? Were its answers

similar to the theurgical practices outlined above? I explore these issues in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Theurgy: The Nexus of Magic and Salvation in *DAC*

The Path of Higher Knowledge in *De arte cabalistica*

> God has given to men who walk upon the earth nothing they could more desire than this contemplative art ....[441]

> By these Scriptures let us be lifted from earth with the beasts and wheels of Ezekiel's vision. Let us go where they go, let us stop when they stop. This only is the area of real contemplation, where individual mysteries, syllables, diacritic and punctuation marks are full of secret meaning. This is attested to not only by our authors but also by Christians. This is the Kabbalah which will not allow us to stop at ground level, it lifts our minds to the highest stage of understanding. Our minds cannot, however, by rational means, climb to the soul of the Messiah, except by some incomprehensible intuition that comes in a flash.[442]

Reuchlin framed *DAC* as a physical journey to the fount of ancient wisdom. It is a literary genre familiar to Western contemporary minds raised on tales of King Arthur's court. In this case, the seekers were not the Knights of the Round Table but two men, one a Pythagorean (Philolaus) and the other a Muslim and a Christian (Marranus). [443] The guide was not Merlin but Kabbalist Simon ben Eleazar; the object

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[441] Reuchlin 1983, 45.

[442] Reuchlin 1983, 117.

[443] Marranus seems to be a composite of Muslim, Christian, and Jew. His name is surely a reference to the Spanish word *marrano* referring to Jews who publically converted to Christianity. Reuchlin called Marranus a Muslim: "In my tale, two men come separately to Frankfurt in order to visit one Simon, a Jew with knowledge of Kabbalah. They meet at an inn. They are Philolaus, a young follower of Pythagoreanism, and Marranus, a Moslem." Reuchlin 1983, 39-41. However, Marranus is also aquainted with Judaic and Christian teachings: "I have been both baptized and circumcised, and am equally schooled in the Law of Moses and in Christian teachings" Reuchlin 1983 41. "You are more in love with your own kind, Marranus, than with truth. For you, no one counts unless he's a Christian."

of the journey was not the Holy Grail but knowledge of Kabbalah. Like the quest for the Holy Grail, the journey was fuelled by passionate desire and yearning. Why? "The height of blessedness and the greatest happiness" awaited the traveller who completed the journey. [444] For Reuchlin the Christian, this height was salvation. In this chapter I will support my argument that *DAC* was primarily a claim to the higher knowledge of salvation through the methodology of theurgy, using insights drawn from the last chapter.

The Goal

In *DAC* Reuchlin presented more than one idea of salvation drawn from Christian, pagan and philosophic sources: "universal restoration, after the Primordial Fall of the human race"[445]; "eternal life in God, granted by God"[446]; "apprehension of the divine"[447]; "apprehension of the highest good"[448]; and coming as close as one can to the Messiah.[449] Reuchlin combined these ideas into an ascent culminating in Christ. Salvation began by traversing the material world of the senses with the aid of reason and knowledge. Upon reaching its edge, the seeker could only continue by abandoning logic and syllogism for faith in divine revelation. With the assistance of the divine word and angels he could then climb to the intelligible world of Celestial beings. From

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Reuchlin 1983, 161. I suggest that Philolaus represents a Pagan point of view, Marranus a monotheistic point of view, and Simon the Kabbalist is the link between the two.

[444] Reuchlin 1983, 157.

[445] Reuchlin 1983, 65.

[446] Reuchlin 1983, 165.

[447] Reuchlin 1983, 61.

[448] Reuchlin 1983, 243.

[449] "True salvation in the Messiah depends on the degree of nearness to him that we can attain" Reuchlin 1983, 115. "But a man is said to apprehend it when he comes as close as he can, as he who touches the hem of the garment is said to have touched the man who wears it." Reuchlin 1983, 243.

there he could see, but never cross, the abyss to the formless, indescribable, super-supreme world of God. However, in the intelligible world, the weary traveller could rest in the soul of the Messiah while blissfully apprehending the divine.[450]

Only Christ could restore this "intimacy with God himself, the delightful face of the divinity (*iucundissimum divinatatis aspectum*), brim-full of everything pleasurable."[451] While the meaning of the word *aspectum*[452] is ambiguous, Reuchlin was perhaps alluding to the idea that not even Moses saw the face of God. As Simon explained elsewhere, only forty-nine of the fifty gates of understanding[453] were open to Moses. The highest gate, where stands the "the one creator of all" was open only to the Messiah, the only entity that could fully know God.[454] Moses rose high enough "to discern the light of His garment," but not his face (*facies*).[455] Reuchlin wrote that the fiftieth gate was the knowledge of God's essence, his face – "the incomparable world that cannot be made comprehensible by any analogy."[456] Was Reuchlin suggesting that man, through Christ, could attain this perfect knowledge – the vision of the face of God?

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[450] Reuchlin 1983, 117-21, 151, 159.

[451] Reuchlin 1983, 105.

[452] The word *aspectum* could also be translated as look/appearance/sight/expression in the eyes. Whether or not the seeker was looking directly at the face of god is ambiguous.

[453] For a brief overview of various interpretations of the gates of understanding (as cosmology which is the interpretation Reuchlin takes, or as different ways of interpretating the Torah) from a kabbalistic perspective, see Idel 2002, 209 -213.

[454] Reuchlin 1983, 249, 255.

[455] "'But', he said, 'you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live...and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.'" Exodus 33: 20, 23.

[456] Reuchlin 1983, 251.

While Reuchlin struggled to maintain the abyss between God and man with his conception of salvation as a vision of, [457] rather than union with, God, he nevertheless alluded to man's divinity and the possibility of some type of union. Simon began his exposition on Kabbalah with an explanation of man's ability to share both nature and supernature. Perhaps in a reference to the Chaldean and Neoplatonic concept of deification (*deificatio*), he explained this term as God breathing enlightenment (*illuminatio)* from His mind into the mind (*mens*) of man. Simon explained that mind alone was the divine aspect of man, and therefore the only aspect of man capable of achieving "that Godlike state" and then "godliness." [458]

While the main agent through which one achieved this state was the Messiah, who Reuchlin of course considered to be Christ, he suggested two other intelligent mediums, the Soul and angels. The Pythagorean, Philolaus, introduced the Plotinian concept of a super or perfect soul with a human aspect situated within "the body of a mortal man," and a more perfect aspect distinct from other souls "next to God." Philolaus then commented that because that soul dwelt in the third world of God, "there [was] union of God and created (*unio dei & creature*)." According to Pythagoras "man could become an immortal god ... the great God either draws in both parts [body and soul] and absorbs them in His deity, or he entrusts to the soul the task of flooding the elevated body with his clarity and glorification."[459] This contradicted an earlier statement of Philolaus in which he unequivocally stated that no created thing

[457] "Clear vision of God, and unending enjoyment of the divinity, to the limits of human ability, understanding and desire – these are the gifts granted to the blessed." Reuchlin 1983, 103.
[458] Reuchlin 1983, 45-51.
[459] Reuchlin 1983, 229-31.

could be drawn into the third world (*Nihil tamen mere creaturum ad tertium mundum*), which belonged to Deity alone. Perhaps the reconciliation came in the next statement, that this highest world contained all other worlds.[460] Finally, Simon in his elaboration on the names of angels stated: "You will find that it is even through the angels that we are joined to God, the ineffable Tetragrammaton YHVH in whom the first thing to shine is the noble nature of these angels."[461]

The Methodology

Salvation was possible through the medium of Christ, super-soul, and angel. One could enlist the aid of these intelligences in the upward journey towards God through contemplation,[462] of a particular type: "The blessed state of contemplative men comes, I would say, from a superior method of meditation."[463] God revealed that superior method to Moses on Mount Sinai so that the he, and the elite to whom he passed on this knowledge, could find within the Torah true knowledge of God.[464] This art involved "either ordering and varying the order of the letters or of sweetly interpreting Sacred Scripture to elevate the mind."[465] The Kabbalist could use the holy letters to ascend to the immaterial world not through reason but by "assiduous,

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[460] Reuchlin 1983, 151.

[461] Reuchlin 1983, 275.

[462] "Kabbalah is a matter of divine revelation handed down to further the contemplation of the distinct Forms and of God, contemplation bringing salvation." Reuchlin 1983, 63

[463] Reuchlin 1983, 291.

[464] "So the confusion of letters produced by exchanges within the alphabet has hidden information from the uncouth and the unworthy that has been revealed, by the combining of letters, to holy men who lead a contemplative life." Reuchlin 1983, 333

[465] Reuchlin 1983, 293.

continuous and diligent, day- and night-long meditation."[466] This was not a passive act but rather an active manipulation using *gematria,* which equated words through their arithmetic totals, *notariacon,* which substituted letters, words and sentences, and *themurah,* which replaced a letter in one ordering of the Hebrew alphabet with another letter in a different ordering.[467]

These methods were superior because they manipulated the letters of the Holy Scriptures, and hence accessed the power of God. Simon explained that, as many commentators including Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla in *The Gates of Justice* had shown, "nearly all the ancient Sacred Scripture" could be reduced to the tetragrammaton.[468] Quoting from various Jewish sources,[469] Simon further explained that God was "his own Tetragrammaton" and that "[t]he Tetragrammaton created heaven and earth."[470]

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[466] Reuchlin 1983, 293.

[467] Through Simon, Reuchlin gave a lengthy explanation of these techniques, which he called the three paths of the art of Kabbalah. I base the following description on Reuchlin's understanding of the terms as explicated in *DAC. Gematria,* the arithmetic of letters, consists of two operations; a word can either be taken for another word through the transposition of syllables or through the number equivalency of two words. *Notariacon,* the manipulation of letters, substitutes a letter for a word or a word for a sentence or expression. The name comes from the marks or *notaria* on top of a letter that designate that it is a sign for a whole word. The third part is *themurah,* or the commutation of letters, where a letter replaces another letter that is particularly associated with it. Reuchlin commented that this was easier in Hebrew than in Latin. Reuchlin 1983, 295-333. Wolfson succinctly explains these terms as numerology, acrostics, and transpositions respectively. Elliot R. Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," *Kabbalah: Journal for the Study of Jewish Mystical Texts* 13 (2005): 40.

[468] Reuchlin 1983, 287.

[469] Some Kabbalist – Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla, some philosophic – Moses Maimonides, some Hasidic – Rabbi Eleazar of Worms. Reuchlin made no distinction among his sources. This leaves one to wonder if he was aware of the difference or, as Joseph Blau suggests, that he was attempting to name and hence protect as many books as possible from future conflagrations. Joseph L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press Inc., 1944), 51, 53.

[470] Reuchlin 1983, 251. Also "He is the beginning or 'aleph', and he is the Tetragrammaton, which is denoted by aleph and refers to the divine Essence (HVYH) which is nearly the same as the essence YHVH .... The ineffable name denotes the first essence." Reuchlin 1983, 301-3.

The letters of the Hebrew alphabet were the basis of creation,[471] and names composed of these letters reflected the essence of both God and his creation. Here Reuchlin drew on Plato's Cratylus in which Socrates suggested that names were not arbitrary symbols but instead reflected reality.[472] Therefore, through manipulating the holy letters of the Hebrew alphabet,[473] the contemplator could travel upwards towards God and summon spiritual entities downwards.

> Through the Messiah we come to the unknowable God; we come thither through these holy letters, as if on Jacob's ladder, the ladder that touches the roof of heaven and while God rests upon it the angels ascend and descend, carrying prayers up and gifts down, bearers of petitions and assistance, as some of your people say.[474]
>
> [I]f we become closely associated with them [angels], we shall find nothing – in word or deed – difficult ....
> By these symbols [the seventy two names of the angels that refer back to the Tetragrammaton] the angels are summoned and bring help to men. [475]
>
> You can summon whatever angel you like by his own symbolic name.[476]
>
> Each of these verses [from the Book of Psalms] contains the Tetragrammaton with the name of one of the seventy-two angels (except for one relevant verse that comes at the beginning of Genesis[477]). By these verses [Kabbalists] lift their minds as high as they can go towards God .... The angels help them in their task so that they leave secular care behind and are carried as far as they are able to God ..."[478]

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[471] "This last speculation from letters concerns the substance of the letter with regard to itself .... In this method they signify ... all creation that began from the first clause and is reducible again to the first clause."Reuchlin 1983, 315 "The fourth type of letters exists in created things and in all creation." Reuchlin 1983, 319 "You must realize that the twenty-two letters are the basis of the world and of the Law, as is fully explained in book 2 of the *Garden of Nuts* [written by Joseph Gikatilla]."Reuchlin 1983, 329.

[472] See note 298.

[473] See Reuchlin 1983, 311, 317 for his belief in the superiority of Hebrew, "the fount of all languages." See also Alison P. Coudert, "An Eavesdropper in the Garden of Eden: The Search for the *Ursprache* and the Genesis of the Modern World," in *The Language of Adam: Die Sprache Adams*, ed. Alison P. Coudert (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999).

[474] Reuchlin 1983, 117.

[475] Reuchlin 1983, 261.

[476] Reuchlin 1983, 273.

[477] He further explicates this on 339.

[478] Reuchlin 1983, 277.

Kabbalists were "snatched up in spirit" to the Messiah,[479] or remained in the material world to work miracles (*miracula*)[480] through "some of the Names of God and the angels, and the powers and the sacred signs by whose force and power many have promised to achieve feats that to the vulgar seem astonishing."[481] With the aid of divine letters, they created "excellent amulets" that, according to Simon, proved "efficacious in continuous use in combating illness and other problems."[482] With the hidden information revealed by combining letters, contemplative holy men like Jeremiah were able to create a new man (*creatur homo novus*). The golem Jeremiah created brought the information that "God the Tetragrammaton is true" written on his forehead and advice on "how to lay hold of Him."[483]

Although more fully explicated in Reuchlin's first cabalistic work, *DVM*, Reuchlin mentioned and briefly explained in a number of places a word more powerful than the tetragrammaton from his perspective as a Christian. Marranus commented to Simon:

> All that the Kabbalists can do through the ineffable name with the signs and characters you have just shown us, can be done in a much stronger way by faithful Christians through the effable name IESV with the sign of the Cross that belongs to it. They believe that they have much the best pronunciation of the Name of the Tetragrammaton in the name of YHSVH, the true Messiah .... [484]

Using the kabbalist art of *notariacon* and *gematria*, Reuchlin suggested that the letter 's' or *shin*, signified both mercy and the anointing oil of the Messiah. The five letters of the pentagrammaton also meant mercy.

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[479] Reuchlin 1983, 117.
[480] Reuchlin 1983, 123.
[481] Reuchlin 1983, 341.
[482] Reuchlin 1983, 351.
[483] Reuchlin 1983, 333-35.
[484] Reuchlin 1983, 353.

> There are no other letters by which "mercy" by itself can be denoted – only the five: Y,H,W,H, and S. Of the first four, it is written in *The Gate of Justice* that: "This is the mystery of which our rabbis of blessed memory spoke: behold the Tetragrammaton YHWH will come forth from its place," (quoting from Micah); "It will come forth through its property of mercy."[485]

In other words in Reuchlin's estimation, the name of the Saviour, the pentagrammaton, improved upon the tetragrammaton because it was pronounceable and hence more powerful.[486]

Certainly the superior method of contemplation that Reuchlin advocated was one of active engagement with or, more strongly worded, forcing one's presence upon spiritual entities. There was no patient waiting for God's grace here. Kabbalists were able to bring about such wonderful things (*sint admiranda efficere*) by their actions with letters, figures, words, and songs (*carmines*).[487] The word *carmen* points in an interesting direction. It can mean song or poem; it can also mean spell, incantation, or ritual formula.[488] Perhaps the type of contemplation Reuchlin advocated in *DAC* was within the context of ritual.

He wrote that only ritual – "the external physical stimuli of sound and sight" – had the ability to "arouse our sleepy minds ... to spiritual work." These stimuli included "signs, letters and phrases, the hymns and canticles, drums and choirs,

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[485] Reuchlin 1983, 115. He also mentions this concept on pages 77, 81, and 113.

[486] In fact, in Hebrew script, Jesus is written YSW'- *yod, shin, vav, ayin* (Yeshua). It is philologically impossible to add an '*s*' to the middle of the tetragrammaton. Friedman 1983, 80-1

[487] Reuchlin 1983, English 31; Latin 348.

[488] For instance in Republican Rome, the Laws of the Twelve Tablets punished anyone who chanted (*incantare)* a *carmen malum* with intent to take away the harvest of a neighbour. However, as healing aids, *carminis auxiliare*s or singing spells were acceptable. Fritz Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World* (Idéologie et pratique de la magie dans l'antiquité Gréco-Romaine), trans. Philip Franklin (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 41-4.

stringed instruments, cymbals, organs and other musical instruments."[489] Like so many before him, Reuchlin believed that it was incomprehensible signs and figures ("individual words, individual mysteries, syllables, diacritic and punctuation marks ... full of secret meaning"[490]), rather than reasoning that facilitated the ascent to divinity. He emphasized the power of meaningless sounds (*non significatiuae voces*) over meaningful ones.[491] Engagement of several senses – the sight and sound of letters for instance, was more effective in arousing the sleepy mind. Simon, while commenting that "[o]nly silly idiots need[ed] a push from without," agreed that because men were born unequal, "different things always affect[ed] different people in different ways."[492] However, Reuchlin differentiated his "rites and ceremonies," between those he referred to as speculation,[493] and those "carried out by rough, uneducated people who were often not untainted by vice and sin."[494]

The following is an attempt to reconstruct Reuchlin's path, as explicated in *DAC*, towards knowledge of God.[495] It contained both a theoretical and practical component. The theoretical component is easier to discern – the practical aspect is perhaps intentionally vague. The ladder towards truth began with knowledge of the natural world: especially diligent study of the humanities, mathematics, and physics, and the use of syllogistic reasoning. This stage also demanded purification: "avoidance

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[489] Reuchlin 1983, 269. Note the elements of Catholic ritual included with signs, letters, and phrases.

[490] Reuchlin 1983, 117.

[491] Reuchlin 1983, English 269-71; Latin 268.

[492] Reuchlin 1983, 271.

[493] See also Reuchlin 1983, 97: "Kabbalists ... are called 'men who speculate on the matters of the Law.'"

[494] Reuchlin 1983, 293.

[495] Reuchlin 1983, 53-61, 133-37.

of vice and the cultivation of virtue."[496] Through "persistent study and careful reasoning,"[497] and "with one's morals ... in order, and the mind cleansed,"[498] the seeker was ready for the leap into the formal world of distinct intelligences. However, he could not rely on the same methodology. "Divine things [lay] beyond syllogistic reasoning."[499] It appeared that a lower type of ritual reminiscent of Church ritual could initially be used to disengage the rational intellect. However, a superior type of ritual involving symbols was required to "lift the mind [*mens*] to higher things."[500] This required, as already mentioned, contemplation on the holy name and the letters. This type of meditation appeared to be a turning inwards requiring silence, "a movement from a life of action to a life of contemplation, consisting in peace of mind, quietness and calm, and setting ourselves apart from the trouble and material cares of this world."[501] At the same time, it appeared to include active ritual involving manipulation of letters. This way of the Kabbalists unlocked the knowledge of God, through some type of ecstatic experience.

> We shall proceed through the combinations of the twenty-two alphabets until with careful, prudent and unflagging diligence we reach the highest and first alphabet. We need to run through each combination carefully until the voice of God becomes clear and the text of Sacred Scripture is opened up and offered to us.[502]

While the effort came from man, it was God through nature who planted the yearning for the divine within him.[503] It was God who gave man the study of

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[496] Reuchlin 1983, 217. See also 53.
[497] Reuchlin 1983, 61.
[498] Reuchlin 1983, 53.
[499] Reuchlin 1983, 137.
[500] Reuchlin 1983, 99.
[501] Reuchlin 1983, 111.
[502] Reuchlin 1983, 337.
[503] Reuchlin 1983, 49.

Kabbalah,[504] God who granted salvation,[505] and God who was ultimately responsible for miraculous works.[506]

To summarize, Reuchlin found the answer to his quest for higher knowledge in his interpretation of Kabbalah, which Elliot Wolfson characterizes "as a doctrine of salvation that reverses the import of original sin."[507] The first Kabbalah[508] of all was God's revelation and Adam's receiving of the announcement of salvation through the angel Raziel:

> The primal sin will be purged in this way; from your seed will be born a just man, a man of peace, a hero whose name will in pity contain these four letters – YHWH – and through his upright trustfulness and peaceable sacrifice will put out his hand and take from the Tree of Life, and the fruit of that Tree will be salvation to all who hope for it.[509]

The second Kabbalah was God's revelation, and Moses' receiving of the art of interpreting the Torah through permutation of letters.[510] Reuchlin described the higher knowledge as "that golden heavenly apple," and the methodology of how to access that knowledge as the silver thread binding the apple in "complicated rules and human skills."

> If you look at the apple from a distance you see the covering and think it is silver, but on closer inspection you discover the gold. And as gold differs from silver, so Kabbalah from Kabbalistic art, though both are facets of the same kind of spiritual insight.[511]

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[504] Reuchlin 1983, 61.
[505] Reuchlin 1983, 165.
[506] Reuchlin 1983, 351.
[507] Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 18.
[508] The word Kabbalah means receiving, and it is this meaning that Reuchlin seems to focus on or stress in his understanding of Kabbalah. Dan comments that "'Kabbalah' in the Hebrew religious vocabulary means nonindividual, nonexperiential religious truth, which is received by tradition". Dan 2006, 3. As Dan points out, this "conveys the opposite of what usually is recognized as 'mysticism.'"
[509] Reuchlin 1983, 73.
[510] Reuchlin 1983, 293.
[511] Reuchlin 1983, 95.

Similar to methodologies described in Chapter Three, in *DAC* man and divinity worked for salvation of the body and of the spirit. Humanity did so by accessing God's power at God's behest; human will was tied to God's will. The seeker, through external and internal activity, journeyed upwards and brought spiritual helpers downwards.

As I have already mentioned, the word theurgy did not appear in *DAC*. Reuchlin considered himself a devout Christian, not a heretic or a magician. He wrote to Cologne theologian Arnold of Tungern: "Whatever therefore the Holy Church, which is the column and foundation of truth, believes, and however it believes, I will also believe the same."[512] He distanced himself from the techniques of magic in *DAC* with such words as "occult nonsense" (*fictio magica*),[513] "sly magicians" (*versuti magici*), [514] and "false magic" (*magicae vanitatis*).[515]

As Christopher Celenza notes, the scholar must be very careful when taking a thinker at his word, especially when there is evidence to the contrary.[516] The words 'false magic' imply the acceptance of 'true magic.' According to *DAC*, *miracula* drew their power from God and angels; false magic depended on the Devil and his demons and used such occult nonsense as the *Sefer Raziel,*[517] Egyptian spells (*cantiones*), and

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[512] Quoted in Overfield, "A New Look at the Reuchlin Affair," 177.
[513] Reuchlin 1983, 95.
[514] Reuchlin 1983, 123.
[515] Reuchlin 1983, 123.
[516] Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism," 73.
[517] Reuchlin 1983, 95. Supposedly written by Solomon, Roling describes it as "probably the most significant collection of magical literature in Hebrew, ... [which] became part of a wider context of magical practices and prescriptions." Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 235.

secret signs (*arcana*).[518] Kabbalists used the art of Kabbalah to perform miracles (*miraculae*) for the good of man; sly magicians used their skills to bring about his downfall.[519]

Did Reuchlin truly reject magic, or was that rejection a matter of definition, context, and self-defense?

Magic, Theurgy, Contemplation, and Kabbalah

> Marranus: Did you know this scholar [Comite Ionne Pico Mirandulo], the one who introduced "Kabbalah" into Latin?
> Simon: Yes, I did, I think. I knew him when he was in exile in France and Savoy. He was forced to flee the country, persecuted by people who were envious of his fine work in philosophy and his superior ability.[520]

> Simon: I am afraid that if I teach such foreign ideas, I shall suffer what many good men before me have suffered: there will be an ignominious outcry from the spiteful crowd who condemn everything they don't know about and with malignant intent readily twist words to read them in some sense other than that in which the writer intended.[521]

Reuchlin found his answer to the question of how to achieve salvation in a particular interpretation of Kabbalah that fit well with Christian notions about the ability of human action to appropriate the creative power of God. In Reuchlin's syncretic discourse the powerful four-letter tetragrammaton had became the Pythagorean *tetractys* and then the five-letter pentagrammaton. Drawing on the non-semantic power of this name and the Hebrew language, the devout Christian could,

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[518] Reuchlin 1983, 123
[519] Reuchlin 1983, 123.
[520] Reuchlin 1983, 89.
[521] Reuchlin 1983, 243.

through his own actions, come close to the Messiah and achieve salvation. While salvation through Christ was certainly orthodox, Reuchlin's reliance on the powers of the Hebrew language was not. Ritual manipulation of meaningless letters and sounds to ascend upwards or draw spiritual powers downwards appeared to have more to do with heterodox magic than orthodox theology or philosophy.

As in antiquity and modernity, *De arte cabalistica* needed to differentiate its methodology from the pejorative and sometimes dangerous label of magic, to find a path away from scorn and derision at best, and heresy at worst. Erasmus, a humanist contemporary, scorned his methodology. In a letter addressed to Wolfgang Capito in 1518 he wrote: "Talmud, Cabala, Tetragrammaton, Portae Lucis – empty names! I had rather see Christ infected by Scotus than by that Rubbish."[522] Luther dismissed the Kabbalah as suitable only for "curious and idle scholars." Theologically, he felt words could only have impact through faith, not through the divine power of individual Hebrew letters.[523] The Church first found Pico's magical theses, and then his entire *Nine Hundred Theses* heretical. The Inquisitor Jacob Hoogstraten wrote *Destructio cabalae seu cabalistice perfidie ab J. Reuchlin capnione in lucem edite* in 1519 in his efforts to persecute Reuchlin over the Reuchlin Affair.

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[522] Overfield, "A New Look at the Reuchlin Affair," 199.

[523] Oberman, "Three Sixteenth-Century Attitudes to Judaism: Reuchlin, Erasmus and Luther," 346.

Strategies of Differentiation

The original definition of magic as Persian religious practice[524] carried a neutral or even positive connotation that did not extend to indigenous Greek and Roman practitioners. These included the *agúrtēs* or beggar priest, *mántis* or diviner, *kathartēs* or purification priest, *alazon* or quack, and *goēs*[525] associated with funerary rites, ecstasy, divination, and healing. Their practices may have been different, but Persian, Greek, and Roman ritualists existed at the margins of Greek and Roman societies. The word magic, first applied to "foreigners with exotic skills that aroused apprehension,"[526] soon encompassed a variety of non-civic, indigenous religious forms as well as suspicious and evil acts: "[b]acchic mysteries, ecstatic private cults, purifications, and malevolent sorcery."[527] What Cicero had described as the priestly activities of wise men and scholars from Persia,[528] Pliny the Elder (23-79C.E.), writing a century later, called "the most deceitful of all arts."[529] In his opinion, magical rites included killing and eating men.[530]

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[524] Herodotus, in the sixth century B.C.E., applied the Persian word *magos* meaning priest or religious specialist to a member of a tribe or secret society responsible for royal sacrifices, funeral rites, divination, and interpretation of dreams. Xenophon called them "technicians in matters divine," and Plato described them as teaching the science of the *magoi* derived from Zoroaster. Fritz Graf, "Excluding the Charming: The Development of the Greek Concept of Magic," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers Inc., 2001), 30.

[525] *Goēteia* may have originally described a native priestly or shamanistic religious practice that pre-dated the Olympic gods. Robert K. Ritner, "The Religious, Social, and Legal Parameters of Traditional Egyptian Magic," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers Inc., 2001), 45.

[526] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10.

[527] Graf 1997, 34.

[528] Graf 1997, 36.

[529] From Book 30 of his *Natural History*; quoted in Graf 1997, 49.

[530] From 30.13 of *Natural History*; quoted in Janowitz 2002, 2. This brief discussion on the origins of the word magic is drawn from Jan N. Bremmer, "The Birth of the Term 'Magic'," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic From Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, Gronignen Studies in Cultural Change, General Editor M. Gosman, no. 1 (Leuven: Peeters,

Neoplatonists

No wonder then that men like Porphyry, Iamblichus and Proclus attempted to carve out a legitimate space to access the Divine by means of ritual that appeared suspiciously similar to magic or *goēteia*. These Neoplatonic thinkers were not willing to give up what they perceived as the powerful ground of ritual to magicians, sorcerers, and swindlers.[531] Whereas theologians and philosophers only talked about the divine, they considered those who used ritual to experience it.[532] How then could one differentiate a methodology that was, from a practitioner's perspective, neither magic nor theology or philosophy? One way would be to use a different word. Scholars have speculated that the term theurgy or actions involving the divine, was used to parallel but differentiate it from the term theology or words about the divine.[533]

Neoplatonists distinguished between theurgy and magic through will (divine revelation versus human contrivance and compulsion), purpose (spiritual versus material), intent and character (good versus evil), source of power (gods or pure spirits versus wicked spirits), and effectiveness (real or imaginary). They labelled rituals that were "fashioned by human art,"[534] concerned with "the physical or corporeal powers of the universe,"[535] carried out by those "full of pride ... [who] rejoice in vapours and

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2002), Graf 1997, Graf, "Excluding the Charming: The Development of the Greek Concept of Magic," Kieckhefer 1990, and Ritner, "The Religious, Social, and Legal Parameters of Traditional Egyptian Magic."

[531] *Goēs*, a practitioner of *goēteia*, could be translated as any of these terms. Luck, "Theurgy and Forms of Worship in Neoplatonism," 188.

[532] Smith 1974, 84-5.

[533] See Janowitz 2002, 17-18, and Majercik 1989, 22.

[534] Thorndike Vol 1 1923, 312.

[535] Thorndike Vol 1 1923, Vol 1 312.

sacrifices,"[536] appealed to evil daemons who were naturally depraved and who perpetrated what was unjust and false[537] and whose effects were a result of "an astounded and unstable phantasy,"[538] as false and hence magic.[539]

Christians

Origen (185-ca.254 C.E.) explicitly stated that Christianity forbade the practice of magic.[540] He defended Jesus on the grounds of intent and character against Celsus' accusations that Jesus was nothing more than a sorcerer.[541] Evil spirits were the reason for the efficacy of magicians' rituals: "magic and sorcerers are produced by wicked spirits, held spellbound by elaborate incantations and yielding themselves to sorcerers."[542] However, divine names worked wonders not by the intention of those who used them but by the power of Him who created them.[543]

Augustine acknowledged the attempt to draw a distinction between practitioners of *goēteia*, and theurgy in his discussion of miracles:

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[536] Porphyry's Epistle to Anebo, 26 Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries and Life of Pythagoras*, trans. Thomas Taylor, The Thomas Taylor Series, no. XVII (Somerset, UK: The Prometheus Trust, 1999), 15.

[537] Section 4, Part VII Iamblichus 1999, 103.

[538] Section 6.Part IV Iamblichus 1999, 129.

[539] See also Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions," 285-8; Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions," 285-8, Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 1, and Janowitz 2002, 8-13.

[540] *Against Celsus* I,.38; quoted in Thorndike Vol. 1 1923, 438.

[541] "Moreover, in one passage Origen admits that 'there would indeed be a resemblance' between miracles and magic, 'if Jesus, like the dealers in magic arts, had performed His works only for show; but now there is a not a single juggler who, by means of his proceedings, invites his spectators to reform their manners. Or trains those to the fear of God who are amazed at what they see, nor who tries to persuade them so to live as men who are to be justified by God.' On the contrary, Origen asserts that the magicians' 'own lives are full of the grossest and most notorious sins.'" Thorndike Vol. 1 1923, 439.

[542] *Reply to Celsus* II, 51; quoted in Thorndike Vol. 1 1923, 439.

[543] Thorndike Vol. 1 923, 450, and Janowitz 2002, 34-8.

> Moreover, [miracles] were wrought by simple faith and godly confidence, not by the incantations and charms ... of an art which they call either magic, or by the more abominable title necromancy, or the more honourable designation theurgy; for they wish to discriminate between those whom the people call magicians, who practise necromancy, and are addicted to illicit arts, and condemned, and those others who seem to them to be worthy of praise for their practice of theurgy ...[544]

However, he rejected such a distinction on the grounds that both drew their power from demons: "both classes are the slaves of the deceitful rites of the demons whom they invoke under the names of angels."[545] In contrast, saints with pure intention and the sanction of the church, acted on behalf of God.[546] He maintained that the only entity that could mediate between God and man was Christ.[547]

Centuries later Thomas Aquinas, following the lead of Augustine, rejected magic as unlawful because of its source of power and the intent of the practitioner. The "invocations, entreaties, adjurations, or even commands, as of one person talking with another ... and the "certain characters and geometrical figures" used by magicians were only efficacious because they were addressed to the Devil and his minions.[548] The intent of such actions was usually "to bring about adulteries, thefts, killing, and the like evil practices" rather than "to bring men to the proper good things of men."[549] It was lawful, however, "to pronounce divine words, or to invoke the divine name" or use the sign of the Cross in protecting oneself as long as one did so "with a mind to

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[544] Saint Augustine 1950, bk., 10, chap. 9, 312.

[545] Saint Augustine 1950, bk., 10, chap. 9, 312. See also Thorndike Vol 1 1923, 504-522.

[546] Fritz Graf, "Augustine and Magic," in *The Metamorphosis of Magic From Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, ed. Jan N. Bremmer and Jan R. Veenstra, Gronignen Studies in Cultural Change, General Editor M. Gosman, no. 1 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 94.

[547] Graf, "Augustine and Magic," 101.

[548] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles*, trans. Joseph Rickaby, (London: Burns and Oates, 1905), <http://www2.nd.edu/Departments/Maritain/etext/gc.htm>, Jacques Maritain Center, University of Notre Dame, (accessed Feb. 5, 2007) Book 3:105.

[549] Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles,* Book 3: 106.

honor God alone, from whom the result is expected [without] ... connection [to] any vain observance."[550] It was also lawful to employ "natural things simply for the purpose of causing certain effects such as they are thought to have the natural power of producing."[551]

Perhaps in response to the distinctions Aquinas made between unlawful magical rituals and lawful Christian practices, John the Monk attempted to distinguish his *Liber visionum* from the condemned *Ars Notoria of Solomon.* He included only Latin prayers instead of prayers filled with unknown or strange words; he appealed to and thought he accessed the Virgin Mary as his mediator rather than demons, and warned against succumbing to the temptation of pride and curiosity in the search for knowledge.[552]

Ficino attempted to describe his magic as natural rather than demonic through intent and source of power. Profane magic depended on the worship of daemons while natural magic sought by natural things "the services of celestials for the prosperous health of our bodies."[553] Here he credited the mediating agent with impersonal "reservoirs of natural power" rather than the intelligent faculties of will and intellect.[554] As Walker has pointed out, this was the only magic Ficino could safely

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[550] Aquinas, *Summa Theologica,* I of II: Q3 Article 4.

[551] Fanger, "Plundering the Egyptian Treasure; John the Monk's *Book of Visions* and its Relation to the Ars Notoria of Solomon," 223, Kaske and Clark 1989, 52, 61, and Thomas 1971, 30.

[552] Fanger, "Plundering the Egyptian Treasure; John the Monk's *Book of Visions* and its Relation to the Ars Notoria of Solomon."

[553] Marsilio Ficino, *Three Books on Life: A Critical Edition and Translation With Introduction and Notes*, trans. Carol V. Kaske and John R. Clark, Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, no. 57 (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1989), Apologia 396-7; quoted in Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism," 96. See also Copenhaver, "Hermes Trismegistus, Proclus, and the Question of a Philosophy of Magic in the Renaissance," 88-90.

[554] Copenhaver, "Scholastic Philosophy and Renaissance Magic in the De Vita of Marsilio Ficino," 551.

recommend.[555] However, Walker suggests that Ficino did indeed attempt to harness the power of what he perceived to be good daemons, who inhabited the higher celestial spheres, to affect the soul. He attempted to steer a course in the grey area between natural and demonic magic by using daemon[556] in the Greek rather than the Christian meaning of the word.[557]

Pico based his distinction of two forms of magic on purpose and power source as well. Using the original Greek understanding of the word, Pico defined magic (*μαγεία*) as "the highest and most perfect wisdom" whereas *goēteia* (*γοητεία*) was "the most deceitful of arts." [558] He described the Persian magus as a "worshipper of the divine."[559] He attributed the marvellous (*opus mirabile*) work of magic "principally to God ... whose grace daily pours supercelestial waters of miraculous power (liberally over contemplative men."[560] In contrast, *goēteia* consisted "wholly in the operations and powers of demons,"[561] and depended "on the enemies of the first truth, *those powers of darkness*, which pour the darkness of falsehood over poorly disposed

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[555] Walker 1975, 53.

[556] See note 396.

[557] Walker 1975, 45-53. See also Kaske and Clark 1989, 51-4, 62-70.

[558] Pico della Mirandola 1956, 53.

[559] Pico della Mirandola 1956, 53-4.

[560] Magical Conclusion 6, "Whatever miraculous [*mirabile*] work is performed, whether it is magical or Cabalistic or of any other kind, should be attributed principally to God the glorious and blessed, whose grace daily pours supercelestial waters of miraculous [*mirabilium*] power liberally over contemplative men of good will." Farmer 1998, 497. I would suggest that marvellous, rather than miraculous, would be a better translation. Pico used the word *mirabilis* rather than *miracula* to refer to magical works brought about by magicians. It is interesting to note that he conflates the works of men with the works of God by using the word *mirabilis* to describe both acts. I would suggest that he was implying that the power behind all magic came from God, not the Devil. As he wrote in Magical Conclusion1, modern magic, which he equates with demonic, was not true magic. In Magical Conclusion 3 he explained that "[m]agic is the practical part of natural science." "*Magia est pars practica scientiae naturalis.*" (495, 494)

[561] Pico della Mirandola 1956, 53.

intellects."[562] Therefore, the Church was justified in its attempts to exterminate this type of magic, which he also termed modern.[563]

Reuchlin

While Reuchlin also differentiated his methodology from magic through mediator (angels[564] and Christ, rather than demons and the Devil) and intent, he employed two other strategies. Using the justification of ancient truth first revealed to the Kabbalists, he attempted to disrupt the binary complex that associated ritual with the pejorative connotations of magic, first through re-definition in his first cabalistic book, and then re-alignment in his second.

In *DVM*, Reuchlin named his methodology not magic or theurgy, but instead *soliloquia*. He was attempting to explicate a science that provided infallible knowledge of both the material and divine worlds. He called such a science the art of wonders, and divided it into four categories: *physica* or the science of mechanical wonders, *astrologia*, *magia*, and *soliloquia*, the science of the wonder-working word. Like the Neoplatonists and Pico, he divided *magia* into *goēteia* "based on pacts with evil demons" and theurgy "performed with 'the quiet help of good demons.'"[565] *Soliloquia*,

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[562] Magical Conclusion 1: "All magic (*Magia*) that is in use among the moderns, and which the church justly exterminates, has no firmness, no foundation, no truth, because it depends on the enemies of the first truth, *those powers of darkness*, which pour the darknss of falsehood over poorly disposed intellects." Farmer 1998, 495.

[563] Magical Conclusions 1-5, Farmer 1998, 495-7. See also Ansani, "Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola's Language of Magic,", 89-91.

[564] "Thus arises the Kabbalist's intimate friendship with the angels, through which he comes to know, in the proper manner, something of the divine names and does wonderful things (commonly known as miracles [*miracula*])." Reuchlin 1983, 123.

[565] Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," 115, 117.

unlike the first three stages of knowledge which used only *ratio*, required the *mens* "infused by faith." It also differed from magic in that it was always efficacious and was not dangerous because it depended on God as its source of power, and angels as its mediators. Zika suggests that Reuchlin's objective was to renew philosophy[566] by making it operative through ritual actions and to purify it "of its demonic aspects by an alliance with religion."[567]

In *DAC*, Reuchlin continued this strategy of re-aligning his practice with philosophy and religion, and away from magic. Again in his introductory dedication he bemoaned the demise of the ancient philosophy,[568] and therefore set himself the task of reviving the Pythagorean doctrine through an explication of the "symbolic philosophy of the art of Kabbalah." In his first response to Philolaus' and Marranus' request for an explanation of Kabbalah, Simon repeatedly emphasized its contemplative aspect,[569] first calling it "this contemplative art" (*hac contemplandi arte*). [570] He also equated

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[566] "Certain diligent explorers of arcane matters...whom the recondite powers of words, the abstruse energies of utterances and the divine characters of secret names excite, have been detected in our age (in so far as I judge it correctly) to draw away considerably from the most ancient tracks of the first philosophers and *often err gravely* [my emphasis] concerning the fullest operations of the wonderful effects of mysteries; and especially for this reason, that either because of the fleeting obscurity of figures which have been obliterated, or the perverse defects of the deterioration of libraries, these symbols of that sacred philosophy and most venerable seals of supernatural powers, have not been able to be read, let alone understood." From the dedicatory preface of *DVM* quoted in Charles Zika, "Reuchlin and Erasmus: Humanism and Occult Philosophy," *The Journal of Religious History* 9, no. 4 (1977): 233. This was a different variation of Pico's first magical thesis, which also condemned modern magic.

[567] Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," 120. Zika's excellent article gives an in depth description and analysis of *DVM*. For a briefer description, see Zika, "Reuchlin and Erasmus: Humanism and Occult Philosophy."

[568] "Holy Father [Pope Leo X], philosophy in Italy was once upon a time handed down to men of great intellect and renown by Pythagoras, the father of that school. But over the years it had been done to death by the Sophists' wholesale vandalism, and lay long buried in obscurity's dark night ...." Reuchlin 1983, 37.

[569] Reuchlin 1983, 45-63. He used some form of the word *contemplatus* five times in these pages.

[570] Reuchlin 1983, 45 English, 44 Latin.

Kabbalah with theology, which dealt with "subjects that [were] separate from the natural world," and gave "a more reliable, more robust form of knowledge."[571] In *DAC*, Cabala was philosophy and theology, and its methodology contemplation; rather than magic, theurgy or even *soliloquia*, a word he did not use although he still emphasized the power of the word of God, culminating in the pentagrammaton.[572] Minds could not climb by rational means to the Divine realms,[573] "a place where cogent judgement, the burden of evidence, and syllogistic exposition hold not sway – not even reason (*ratio*) rules there."[574]

Is contemplation theurgy, or can theurgy include contemplation?

The role of contemplation in ancient theurgy is a contentious issue among contemporary scholars. E.R. Dodds stands at one end of the spectrum, separating theurgy from "any inward discipline of the mind which involves no compulsive element and has nothing whatever to do with magic."[575] Therefore, according to Dodds, Plotinus, who advocated contemplation at higher levels of ascent, could not be a theurgist. However, Iamblichus, the author of *De mysteriis*, which Dodds labels as a "manifesto of irrationalism,"[576] was a theurgist because he asserted that ritual rather than reason was the road to salvation. Dodds suggests that "vulgar magic" was the last

[571] Reuchlin 1983, 57.
[572] Reuchlin 1983, 353.
[573] Reuchlin 1983, 117.
[574] Reuchlin 1983, 65.
[575] Dodds, "Appendix II: Theurgy," 286.
[576] Dodds, "Appendix II: Theurgy," 287.

resort of a despairing fourth-century intelligentsia who had given up on philosophy as a means of knowing God.[577]

Yet Iamblichus was a philosopher. Is it realistic to think that he totally rejected the tool of the mind? Celenza provides a different interpretation. He suggests that through a synthesis of ideas drawn from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Chaldean Oracles* and Platonic philosophy, Iamblichus was attempting to "harmonize the highest philosophical approach with the spiritual needs that all, philosophers included, experienced."[578] The following quote, in which Iamblichus was commenting on a passage from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, suggests that there was more than external ritual in his methodology: "[T]hey certainly do not just speculate about these things. They recommend rising up through priestly theurgy toward the higher and more universal levels above fate, to the god and craftsman, *without material attachment or any other help at all except observing the proper time* [my emphasis]."[579]

More recent scholarship has grappled with the possibility that theurgy may have, at the highest levels of ascent, included "a genuine noetic/contemplative element."[580] Standing at the other end of the spectrum Jean Trouillard, in his studies on Proclus, suggests that there was one path of ascent that included both internal philosophic and external ritual methods. He saw in later Neoplatonism "one integral path leading from moral purifications to contemplation and finally to theurgy which

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[577] Dodds, "Appendix II: Theurgy," 287-8.
[578] Celenza, "Late Antiquity and Florentine Platonism," 81-2.
[579] Quoted in Copenhaver 1992, xl.
[580] Majercik 1989, 25. See also Shaw's excellent summary. Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 2-13.

brought about unio mystica."[581] Remniscent of Reuchlin, Trouillard argues that the Neoplatonists, because they recognized the limits of rationality in knowing God, saw the need for another method to carry man beyond those limits.[582]

Other scholars stand between Dodds and Trouillard in not completely rejecting or incorporating contemplation as a theurgical component. Festugière and Lewy suggest that one can ascend to the divine either through the philosophic means of contemplation or the ritual means of theurgy. Rosan and Smith divide theurgy into lower and higher modes, with Rosan calling the former practical and the latter theoretical, and Smith equating the former with the material world of humans and daimons and the latter linking man with the gods. In Proclus,[583] Sheppard identifies three levels of theurgy – a level concerned with human affairs, a level that makes the soul intellectually active, and a level with no ritual component that brings about mystical union.[584]

This limited exploration of Neoplatonic scholarship tells us that theurgy could include contemplation but contemplation was not necessarily theurgy. While Reuchlin called his methodology contemplation, it was of a particular type – it was the cabalistic art of contemplation.

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[581] Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 6.Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 6

[582] Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 6.

[583] Proposition 206: Every particular soul can descend into temporal process and ascend from process to being an infinite number of times. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology: A Revised Text With Translation, Introduction and Commentary by E.R. Dodds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 181.

[584] This summary draws from Shaw, "Theurgy: Rituals of Unification in the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus," 4-10.

Is Kabbalah theurgy?

In examining this question, I will take Kabbalah in Scholem's wider sense as all esoteric movements within Judaism from the end of the Second Temple onwards,[585] and begin with scholarship on the *merkavah/hekalot* literature.

In his analysis of this literature Peter Schäfer identifies two poles, the ecstatic heavenly journey and the magical-theurgical adjuration. Wolfson describes these as "the mystical ascent culminating in a visionary experience, and the adjuration of angels, connected especially with the magical study of Torah without any effort ..."[586] Schäfer notes, in a fashion somewhat reminiscent of the previous scholarly debate over theurgy and contemplation, that while scholars agree on the existence of these two aspects as a means of working with the Divine, they disagree on the way in which these two poles interact and which should be emphasized. [587] At one end of the spectrum, Gershom Scholem insists that the heavenly journey is "the dominant factor in the relationship between man and God," that texts emphasizing this aspect are earlier and hence truer to the original meaning, and that later texts degenerate into magic. [588] Daniel Halperin, at the other end, rejects Scholem's assumptions on dating in arguing that adjuration is the more important aspect through which to interpret this

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[585] See note 340.
[586] Wolfson 1994, 82.
[587] Schäfer 1992, 150.
[588] Schäfer 1992, 151, 156. However, Joseph Dan comments: "Though this movement can be traced to the circle of Rabbi Aqiba in the first half of the second century C.E., the *hekhalot* and *merkavah* texts that have reached us were written much later. Therefore, it is a formidable task to describe in any accurate sense the historical sequence and the interrelationship of the various trends within Jewish mysticism of Late Antiquity." Joseph Dan, "Introduction," in *The Early Kabbalah*, ed. Joseph Dan, Ronald C. Kiener, and Moshe Idel (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 2.

body of literature.[589] Schäfer brings the two together by suggesting that the heavenly journey and the adjuration were both ritual-liturgical actions, permeated by magic: the former aimed at contacting God in heaven, the latter on earth.[590]

While disputing the relationship between the two elements, scholars appear to agree on the difficulty of separating magical-theurgic elements from the journey of ascent. Scholem suggests that the *merkavah* traveller takes on the appearance of the theurgist in his use of divine names to obtain power.[591] Halperin speculates on the close connection between the trance-journey material in the *hekhalot* literature and the adjuration of the *Śar Torah* tradition.[592] Schäfer notes that a heavenly journey without theurgic components was rare.[593] Ascent could culminate in adjuration (summoning of or appeal to a supernatural being); adjuration might have preceded either ascent to the Divine or descent of the Divine; prayer might have been the start of a mystical journey or a means of adjuration; the purpose of an ascent might be to descend with the powerful names of God.

Schäfer concludes his study by suggesting that God had "surrendered his fate to man" through the theurgic power He had granted him. God depended on the liturgical praise of the *yored merkavah* both in heaven and on his return to earth as part of the community of Israel. Through the ritual performance of adjuration, God granted

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[589] Schäfer 1992, 151-2.
[590] Schäfer 1992, 155-6.
[591] Scholem 1995, 56, 77.
[592] Schäfer 1992, 151-2.
[593] Schäfer 1992, 151.

him knowledge of names that commanded "not only the Torah and the world, but finally God as well."[594]

Scholem in his discussion of this literature, like Schäfer, equates theurgy with magical techniques used to force knowledge from divine beings. He notes that the "combination of ecstaticism and magic," which he does not specifically label as theurgic, reappears in conjunction with the prayer techniques of the *Haside Ashkenaz* or *Hasidim*, and notes the influence of their techniques on Jacob ben Jacob ha Cohen and Abraham Abulafia.[595] He does comment on the magical and theurgic tendencies in some Castilian communities to which the former Kabbalist belonged.[596] He does not use the word theurgy in connection with Abulafia's interpretation of Kabbalah – The Path of Names (as opposed to the Path of the Sephirot) or Prophetic Kabbalah. However he acknowledges that Abulafia's method is not "very far removed" from Practical Kabbalah,[597] which "is identified with theurgy, the magical use of Sacred Names,"[598] although Abulafia condemned magic as a "falsification of true mysticism." Abulafia did, however, "admit a magic directed towards one's own self", as opposed to a magic that sought external sensory results. [599]

On the other hand, Moshe Idel uses theurgy and the use of language as defining factors in his three-fold typology of Kabbalah. The theosophic-theurgical model

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[594] Schäfer 1992, 164-6.
[595] Scholem 1995, 100-2.
[596] Scholem 1987, 47, 56.
[597] Scholem 1995, 144.
[598] Scholem 1987, 182. Interestingly, he continues that this "is not at all the same thing as meditation on such names." As I have previously indicated, other scholars disagree. Also, "... in Kabbalistic parlance 'Practical Kabbalism' means ...magic, though practised by means which do not come under a religious ban, as distinct from black magic, which uses demonic powers and probes into sinister regions." Scholem 1995, 144.
[599] Scholem 1995, 145.

reflected in the *Zohar* aimed to understand and restore harmony to the inner structure of the divine world. According to Idel, this model used language as a theurgical tool to effect this restoration, or redemption of God. The mystic-ecstatic model, which is most often associated with Abulafia, sought the experience of uniting self to God through the manipulation of different elements of language. The magical-talismanic model, found within some writings of the previous two models, concerned itself with ritual effects on the material world. It "conceive[d] the divine text as one of the major means to attract supernal (divine or celestial) powers on the magician or mystic."[600] While all these models depend on the ritual effect of the Hebrew language, Idel uses direction and purpose[601] to differentiate them. Idel's theurgy focuses upwards in order to influence or repair God through the observance of the six hundred and thirteen commandments; magical practices focus downwards on the practitioner and the world.[602]

Elliot Wolfson challenges attempts to make taxonomic distinctions among kabbalistic interpretations based on purpose or different interpretations of the commandments. He suggests that both theosophic and ecstatic Kabbalists considered "traditional ritual observance" a means to facilitate "psychic ascent and the ontic

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[600] Idel 2002, 14. A fuller explication of these models is given in Idel *Hasidim* 1995. He also reviews the boundaries and limitations that he places on these models on pp. 45-102.

[601] Idel acknowledges that others do not make such a clear distinction. Idel *New Perspectives* 1988, 157.

[602] See specifically Idel *Hasidim* 1995, 29-30, Idel 2002, 15, Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 196, and Idel *New Perspectives* 1988, 157, 179. Idel devotes two chapters in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (156-199) to theurgy; he subdivides theurgy into various types (for instance augmentation, drawing-down, universe-maintenance, and status-quo).

reintegration into the divine."[603] He inteprets Abulafia's meditative practices as an extension of traditional prayer and liturgical worship; one was to don the *ṭallit* and *tefillin*, and to worship God through ink, pen and tablet.[604] Ritual,[605] which facilitated union of the self with God, also facilitated unification of the divine potencies. Wolfson describes mystical conjunction of self with God and theurgical unification or harmonization of God as two facets of "a core experience of ecstasy."[606] To these goals of unification, Brody adds that of drawing "God's presence, light and blessing into the world."[607] Like Wolfson, he suggests that "contemplative and theurgic intentionality, illuminative insight and empowerment are inextricably intertwined."[608]

Is Kabbalah theurgy? Possibly!

How does contemporary scholarship view Reuchlin's Cabalistic Art?

Depending on the discourse given the most prominence, Reuchlin has been labelled a humanist,[609] scholar and philosopher,[610] human rights activist,[611] magus,[612]

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[603] Wolfson 2000, 185.

[604] See note 376.

[605] Wolfson does not use magic as a distinguishing feature. He comments: "I am not engaging the third model, which Idel identifies as magic, since in my opinion the tripartite typological structure is a variation of the earlier twofold structure, that is the magical is operative in either the theosophic or prophetic framework and one therefore does not gain much by according it an independent taxonomic status." Note 98 on p 204, Wolfson 2005, 518.

[606] Wolfson 2005, 209.

[607] Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 131.

[608] Brody, "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights: Contemplative Ascent and Theurgic Power in Thirteenth Century Kabbalah," 133.

[609] This is the most frequent and earliest label. See, for instance, Rummel 1995.

[610] Spitz, "Reuchlin's Philosophy: Pythagoras and Cabala for Christ."

[611] Overfield, "A New Look at the Reuchlin Affair."

[612] Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century."

and mystic.[613] Less flatteringly, he has also been called a fool,[614] and his cabalistic views "the "misbegotten progeny of a sick mind."[615] He appeared to think of himself as a speculative philosopher.[616] The word theurgist has not been used.

However, two articles by Bernd Roling[617] and Elliot Wolfson[618] specifically link Reuchlin with theurgy. Each views theurgy from different perspectives; Roling emphasizes the role of angels and Christ in perfecting the practitioner; Wolfson emphasizes the role of the Hebrew language derived from the Torah in the practitioner's salvation. However, both emphasize the centrality of divine names, especially the pentagrammaton, as a theurgical tool, and the creative nature of Reuchlin's cabalistic works: Roling focusing on the ways in which Reuchlin synthesized the tetragrammaton, man's deification and the angelic cosmos[619] through the dual nature of Christ as both human and divine, and Wolfson discussing his

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[613] Friedman 1983, 94

[614] Erasmus in *Praise of Folly* wrote: "I know of one notable fool – there I go again, I meant to say scholar – who was ready to expound the mystery of the Holy Trinity to a very distinguished assembly .... He expounded the mystery of the name of Jesus showing with admirable subtlety that the letters of the name seemed to explain all that could be understood about Him...." J. P. Dolan, trans., *The Essential Erasmus. Selected and Newly Translated With Introduction and Commentary by John P. Dolan.* (New York: New American Library, 1964), 151; quoted in Friedman 1983, 93.

[615] From Ludwig Geiger, *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (Leipiz: 1875), 25: 793; quoted in Friedman 1983, 93.

[616] He referred to Kabbalists "who speculate on the matters of the Law." Reuchlin 1983, 97. He saw himself as re-introducing the philosophy of Pythagoras derived from kabbalistic writings. Reuchlin 1983, 39.

[617] Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin."

[618] Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin."

[619] Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 255, 260.

"appropriation and re-inscription of the [Jewish esoteric] theurgical explication of ritual."[620]

Roling limits his discussion to two aspects of Reuchlin's interpretation of Kabbalah: mediating agent and self- transformation, or using spiritual assistance provided by God to become God. He reviews Jewish and Arabic texts[621] that, among other things, claimed that Enoch was transformed into the angel Meṭaṭron, the techniques[622] by which the ritual practitioner could summon angels to do his bidding, and techniques by which the practitioner could perfect himself. He then shows how Reuchlin transposed these ideas into a Christian context through the medium of the Kabbalah. While suggesting that Reuchlin's aim in both his cabalistic texts was that of *deificatio* through the agency of Christ: "man turning into God and God turning into man meet in Christ,"[623] he argues that the magical focus of *DVM* is reduced to theosophical content in *DAC*.[624] However, he notes the magical aptitude of Reuchlin's

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[620] Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 7.

[621] He focuses on the *Shi'ur Qomah* found within the *Sefer Raziel* (a collection of magical literature in Hebrew) partially translated into Latin as the *Liber Razielis*, the *Sefer Hekhalot* or *3 Enoch*, the *Sefer ha-Razim* (the *Book of Mysteries*), the *Sefer ha-Tamar*, *De mysteriis Aegyptiorum* and the *Theology of Aristotle* ("an interpretative paraphrase of the *Enneads* of Plotinus" Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy*, ed. Peter Adamson and Richard C. Taylor, Cambridge Companions (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 4) both mediated through Arabic sources, and the *Ghāyat al-hakīm*. He indicates how Reuchlin would have been familiar with this literature.

[622] "the name is the main device of human influence, since pronouncing the name allows admission into the essence of the angel whose services are required." Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 236.

[623] Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 255.

[624] Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 260. Jerome Friedman concurs with this assessment, although in a more pejorative fashion: "The *DVM* was unsophisticated, uneducated, and in the final analysis, un-Christian .... Over the intervening twenty-three years Reuchlin became a far more systematic and clear-sighted thinker. *DAC*, the product of that twenty-three-year period, was what Reuchlin may have hoped the *DVM* to have been." Friedman 1983, 81.

Kabbalists in *DAC* whose power is derived from "conjunction with God and participation in the angelic world,"[625] the cabalistic art of *meditatio* that "paves the way for transfiguration and unification with the divine,"[626] and the theurgic qualities of "the name of Jesus as the pronounced tetragrammaton."[627]

Wolfson explicitly rejects any attempt to divorce theosophy or contemplation from theurgy[628]; he states that for Reuchlin, knowledge of the *shem ha-meforash*[629] "empowers one with wisdom that is theosophical and theurgical."[630] In fact, Wolfson suggests that the theurgical properties of the divine name and the creative power of Hebrew as God's primary language were central to Reuchlin's understanding of Kabbalah. As such, Wolfson rejects Idel's assertion that Christian interpretations of Kabbalah obliterated "the theurgical nature of this mystical lore."[631] While rejecting some aspects of Jewish ritual and the Law, Reuchlin accepted Torah study as the means of acquiring knowledge of the "mysteries of the Law,"[632] which held the secret

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[625] Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 262.

[626] Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 261.

[627] Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 263; Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 263.

[628] Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 18, 28-9.

[629] The seventy-two letter name of God comes from Exodus 14:19-21 (216 consonants divided into 72 triplets). Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 36.

[630] Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 36.

[631] From Moshe Idel, "Jewish Kabbalah in Christian Garb: Some Phenomenological Remarks," in *The Hebrew Renaissance*, text by Deeana C. Klepper and Michael A. Signer, Exhibit Curator Michael Terry (Chicago: The Newberry Library, 1997), 14-15; quoted in Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 9.

[632] Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 18.

of salvation.[633] Rather than seeing *DAC* as moving away from theurgy, Wolfson positions it as an elaboration of the theurgical aspect of Kabbalah begun in *DVM.*

While the ultimate goal of *DAC* was knowledge of God and his secrets, both Wolfson and Roling suggest that magic was both the method and the unavoidable, if perhaps unintentional, result of accessing God's creative power.[634]

Conclusion

In 1323 in Paris, John the Monk's *Liber visionum* was condemned and burned as heresy and sorcery.[635] In 1398, the theological faculty of the University of Paris issued a condemnation of twenty-eight errors pertaining to the practice of magic. They included in this condemnation any notion "that by certain magical arts we can come to a vision of Divine Essence or of the Holy Spirits."[636] Jean Gerson, then the chancellor of the University, repeated this admonition four years later. In 1488, Pico's *Nine Hundred Theses* and in 1490, Ficino's *De Vita* were both condemned as heretical. In 1505, Trithemius' work on a form of cryptography soliciting the aid of angels was condemned as necromancy and witchcraft. In 1519, Inquisitor Jacob van Hoogstraten attacked Reuchlin's interest in the Kabbalah. In 1562, Guillaume Postel (1510-1581)

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[633] Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 16, 38.

[634] Roling, "The Complete Nature of Christ: Sources and Structures of a Christological Theurgy in the Works of Johannes Reuchlin," 261, and Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 38.

[635] The *Grandes Chroniques de France* (which originated at the abbey of St. Denis in Paris and details the major political and ecclesiastical events of the times); quoted in Watson, "John the Monk's *Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undefiled Virgin Mary, Mother of God:* Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text," 164.

[636] Quoted in Mathiesen, "A Thirteenth-Century Ritual to Attain the Beatific Vision," 158.

was committed to a monastery as insane rather than heretical. In 1600, Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake for heresy.[637]

The dangers of pursuing higher knowledge were considerable! But the rewards were perceived as even greater. In *DAC*, Reuchlin believed he had presented a doctrine of salvation in which God and man worked together to repair the damage of Adam's great sin through the mediation of Christ. With this assumption, he considered himself as having performed a great service for the Church.[638] I suggest that Reuchlin attempted to gain acceptance for his conflation of contemplation, magic, and salvation, which I have called his own particular brand of theurgy, by positioning it as the ancient wisdom of Kabbalah and the kabbalistic art.[639] In doing so, Reuchlin augmented the discourse of Cabala.

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[637] Postel was a scholar, a linguist, a Cabalist and a self-proclaimed prophet. "He devoted many years of his life to attempting to persuade others of his new revelation, the claim that Jesus had reappeared on earth as a woman in order to comlete the redemptive process and usher in a new age of world concord, united under the Catholic Church and the king of France." Postel used the Kabbalah to substantiate his claims. Yvonne Petry, *Gender, Kabbalah and the Reformation: The Mystical Theology of Guillaume Postel (1510-1581)*, vol. XCVIII, Studies in Medieval and Reformation Thought, Editor Andrew Colin Gow (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 1.

After leaving the Dominican order in 1576, Bruno wandered Europe for fifteen years. His books spanned "the intellectual interests of the sixteenth century: from mathematical and scientific treatises, to moral and metaphysical dialogues, to esoteric and mystical tractates." Karen S. De León-Jones, *Giordano Bruno and the Kabbalah: Prophets, Magicians and Rabbis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 1-2. Variously depicted as a liberator and martyr, magus, Hermeticist, and scientific revolutionary, De León-Jones argues that he saw himself as a mystic and prophet of a spiritual renewal, creatively interpretating kabbalistic, and cabalistic ideas. (3,15-16).

[638] Reuchlin 1983, 357-59.

[639] Wolfson takes a similar trajectory. "The critical point for the purposes of this study is to note that Reuchlin, already in his early work, closely following the approach of Pico, affirmed an intricate connection between kabbalah and a theurgical conception of the name. Precisely this knowledge privileged the Jewish mystical tradition as the most sublime articulation of occult philosophy, combining contemplation and magic, a synthesis that made it possible for Reuchlin (and by implication, other Christian believers) to embrace the ritual efficacy of kabbalah even while upholding the long-standing rejection of rabbinic law on the part of the Church as an effective means for atonement and deliverance." Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 15-16.

I have placed knowledge achieved through magic, and knowledge achieved through reason at the head of a binary complex that juxtaposed ritual against thought, and judged the latter superior. Reuchlin rejected both magic and reason as the means of acquiring higher knowledge of God. Instead he attempted to carve out a middle ground between the two in arguing that this knowledge could only be achieved through the contemplative art of Cabala (his interpretation of Kabbalah). I have labelled this methodology theurgy. What are the binaries and the boundary between knowledge acquired by reason and knowledge acquired through ritual that theurgy and Reuchlin attempted to disrupt in order to make such a methodology acceptable?

Chapter Five: Boundaries and Binaries

> I am not bound by the rules of any school of thought. I do not want to be prevented by constraints of any sectarianism from freely defending what my conscience allows.[640]

> The philosophers [*ḥakhmei ha-meḥqar*] say that human intellect [*sekhel ha-adam*] has a limit, and from the way of custom [*mi-derekh ha-minhag*] we see that every thing has a boundary [*gevul*], measure [*sh'iur*], and dimension [*middah*].[641]

> If some general lesson is to be gleaned from what follows, it is only that the purportedly most essential, objective, and timeless truths have nothing to commend them but the descriptions of those who happen to call them true.[642]

Rodney Needham in his book *Primordial Characters* suggests that there are certain intrinsic characteristics that make up human consciousness and are, therefore, foundational to the formation of human culture.[643] He calls them "primary factors of experience" or the "semantic units" through which we attempt to explain and understand our human experience.[644] Using the example of what he terms the universal symbolism of right and left, he theorizes that binary opposition, as the simplest form of classification, is one of these factors.[645] He suggests that binary

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[640] Reuchlin 1983, 41.

[641] From Azriel of Gerona's: *Perush Eser Sefirot*; in Ibn Gabbai, *Derekh Emunah*, 3a.; quoted in Wolfson 2005, 199.

[642] Clark 1997, x.

[643] Rodney Needham, *Primordial Characters* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1978), 2, 12.

[644] Needham 1978, 8, 14.

[645] Needham 1978, 15.

opposition is not merely a matter of difference or complementarity, but rather a matter of inversion. In this definition of inversion, the characteristic of each pair perceived as superior is inverted to produce its inferior shadow[646] often demarcated by a boundary of morality[647]: for example light/dark or sacrament/magic.

Stuart Clark in *Thinking with Demons* applies this idea to the culture of early modern Europe, although suggesting that these primary factors may have been as much culturally as innately derived. He states that intellectual conditions within Western culture encouraged oppositional thinking, from the cosmology of the early Greeks, the dualistic themes of patristic and medieval Christianity, to educated early modern Europeans who were disposed "to see things in terms of binary opposition on such a scale that we may think of this as one of the distinctive mental and cultural traits of the age."[648]

Both Needham and Clark use the symbol of the witch in early modern Western Europe to illustrate the tendency of primary factors to combine into what Needham calls "complexes,"[649] and Clark "clusters of ideas and symbolisms." Clark writes, in part paraphrasing Needham, that "all cultures have known witchcraft as a synthetic complex of the same primary factors. The complex is, in fact, autonomous, 'and men have merely altered its particulars according to their circumstances.'"[650] In other words, the term witch became a shorthand symbol for a cluster of binary characteristics that sat on the inferior side of the moral boundary.

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[646] A perfect example of the light/dark binary and the implicit judgement that dark is inferior!
[647] Needham 1978, 36.
[648] Clark 1997, 35.
[649] Needham 1978, 18.
[650] Clark 1997, 33.

What happens if we replace the word witch with the words 'magical knowledge,'[651] and expand upon the same complex of binary opposites to create another shorthand symbol? I have constructed a hypothetical complex in Appendix A. If we equate magic with *goēteia*, it is easy to maintain this binary complex, and the definitive boundary of judgement that demarcates inferior from superior. But something more interesting occurs if we equate magic with the *magia* or theurgy of the Persian Wise Men. The boundary no longer holds. As we have seen, theurgic practitioners have challenged and attempted to re-define with the result, intended or not, of disrupting this boundary. I have summarized this disruption in Appendix B.

This disruption occurred in two ways. First, practitioners did not accept or place a boundary between some binary elements; its practitioners attempted to bring divinity downwards as well as travel upwards; their goals could be material as well as spiritual; they might have used both physical and mental rituals; human will worked in conjunction with God's will. Second, practitioners attempted to reverse some binary elements in order to capture the moral high ground; their source of power was God rather than the Devil; the mediator was Christ and angels, rather than demons; their methodology was effective because it drew its power from God and his appointed assistants; the practitioners' intentions were good rather than evil. In effect, they were

[651] Edward Peters draws some interesting links between the practice of magic by magicians, and the practice of magic by witches. He writes "Sorcery had become democratized, and the small magicians who fitted the competence of the [royal] courts became the predecessors of the later humble witches." In his conclusion, he comments: "although both anthropologists and historians persist in separating the crimes of magic and witchcraft, medieval theologians and lawyers did not, and many of the elements of sixteenth-century witchcraft were first brought to light in charges against magicians." Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch, and the Law*, The Middle Ages, Series Editor Edward Peters (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1978), 123, 164-5.

attempting to construct a different binary complex, with theurgical elements forming the superior half of the binary pair.

With boundary erased and elements reversed, confusion ensues. Did this means of acquiring knowledge remain "vulgar magic" used primarily for religious ends as E.R. Dodds defined it[652] or did it become "universal wisdom itself, the very apogee of knowledge of the world"?[653] Did this distinction depend on the presence of certain theurgical elements? If so, how many elements from the superior side of the boundary had to be present before theurgy could move from an illegitimate to a legitimate means of acquiring knowledge? Of the six dimensions of theurgy were there some that carried more weight than others did? If the practitioner followed the will of God with good intention, did that legitimate the practice? Or would it always be illegitimate because it employed active means to acquire knowledge and/or achieve salvation? Or were these elements irrelevant to any judgment?

Both Stuart Clark and D.P. Walker have noted the difficulty in maintaining the boundaries around magic. Clark writes that natural and demonic magic "were at opposite ends of the moral spectrum, but they were epistemologically indistinguishable."[654] D.P.Walker notes that it was difficult to distinguish natural magic from other activities: "magic was always on the point of turning into art, science, practical psychology or, above all, religion."[655] I would suggest that it was not the dimensions of theurgy itself that determined the placement of the boundary

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[652] Dodds, "Appendix II: Theurgy," 291.
[653] Clark 1997, 215.
[654] Clark, "The Scientific Status of Demonology," 364.
[655] Walker 1975, 75-6.

between magic and other activities, or between different types of magic such as natural magic or theurgy, and demonic magic or *goēteia*. The position of the person constructing the definition and their relationships with the dimensions of religion and power, and hence the judgements they made were more important. One century after the publication of *DAC*, a ruling of the Grand Council of Malines, the supreme court of justice in the Low Countries, made this relationship abundantly clear. It stated that "it [was] superstitious to expect any effect from anything, when such an effect [could] not be produced by natural causes, by divine institution, *or by the ordination or approval of the Church* [my emphasis]."[656]

To examine this point further, I turn to a shadow that has been haunting the margins of this thesis. Martin Luther (1483-1546) was a contemporary of Reuchlin's. The two men shared the same social, cultural, religious, and academic milieu. Their texts participated in the discourse of salvation that dominated fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe. In 1517, the same year that Reuchlin published *DAC*, Luther reputedly posted on the doors of the Castle Church in Wittenberg his *Ninety-Five Theses* on indulgences. Although radically different in form and content, these texts shared a fundamental similarity; they both made claims to the higher knowledge of salvation. Luther wrote: "This word [repentance] cannot be understood to mean sacramental penance," "The assurance of salvation by letters of pardon is vain," and "The true treasure of the Church is the Most Holy Gospel of the glory and the grace of God."[657] As we have seen, Reuchlin wrote "True salvation in the Messiah depends on the

[656] This ruling was made in 1607. Thomas 1971, 49.

[657] Luther, *Disputation of Doctor Martin Luther on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences (1517),* Thesis 52.

degree of nearness to him that we can attain,"[658] "that nothing [other than Kabbalah] admits more of the search for salvation in this world, and everlasting life in the next,"[659] and "matters touching the high and the divine must be considered too high and too important to be understood or determined by human reason."[660] In replacing sacrament and indulgences with Scripture, Christ and faith alone, both manuscripts challenged the Church as the gatekeeper to salvation.

While Pope Leo X condemned the writings of both men in 1520, their ideas spread quickly in religious and intellectual circles. Luther's ideas soon entered the mainstream of Christian and Western thought, Reuchlin's faded from orthodox view. Why? I suggest that the answer lies in Reuchlin's perhaps unintentional disruption of boundaries that made his claim to knowledge difficult to classify, judge, and hence accept among both his contemporaries and later scholars. Luther's ideas more easily fit into a binary classification scheme bounded by conventional epistemological categories.[661]

Luther's methodology, which emphasized passively awaiting God's grace through intellectual understanding and contemplation of Scripture, did not disrupt the binary complex constructed around the acquisition of knowledge. His later writings, which were virulently anti-Jewish, were clearly on the side of orthodox Christian judgement and popular sentiment. His interpretations could more easily be defended as authentic Christian thought, rather than a misunderstanding and bastardization of

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[658] Reuchlin 1983, 115.
[659] Reuchlin 1983, 45.
[660] Reuchlin 1983, 133.
[661] See Appendix C.

Jewish esoteric tradition. Men like Erasmus and Luther positioned Kabbalah and Cabala on the inferior or false side of the binary with phrases such as "spiritless fables"[662] and "a demonic language of enchantment."[663] The Protestant Reformation, with its emphasis on the word as read and spoken rather than performed, superseded the reforming impulse of the Cabala. The acquisition of knowledge through intellect and reason rather than ritual was more acceptable to a culture that had begun to question not only the connections between the natural and supernatural worlds, but also the very existence of anything supernatural. Theurgy, and hence the methodology of *DAC*, as a legitimate means of acquiring higher knowledge was discredited and disappeared from view.[664]

Instead of once again attempting to re-align the binary complex against its judgemental dimensions, I have attempted to disrupt the boundary that separates the binary pairs. Certainly I would not be the first to question such boundaries. Ficino was impressed with Archimedes because he "had embodied in his eyes the perfect union of contemplative and active wisdom, under the divine influence of the heavens."[665] Reuchlin in Marranus' voice refused to follow "the rules of any school of thought." Brian Copenhaver warns his reader that the theological and philosophic texts comprising the *Hermetica* were "a product of a culture that made no clear, rigid distinction between *religion* as the province of such lofty concerns as the fate of the

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[662] Zika, "Reuchlin and Erasmus: Humanism and Occult Philosophy," 229; Zika, "Reuchlin and Erasmus: Humanism and Occult Philosophy," 229.

[663] Hsia Po-chia 1988, 135.

[664] It continued, however, in the undercurrents of Western esotericism.

[665] Toussaint, "Ficino's Orphic Magic or Jewish Astrology and Oriental Philosophy?: A Note on *Spiritus*, the *Three Books on Life*, Ibn Tufayl and Ibn Zarza," 20. See also above, Chapter Three In the Early Modern World under Ficino.

soul and *magic* as a merely instrumental device of humbler intent."[666] Francis Yates writes that in its original form philosophy "was to be used, not as a dialectical exercise, but as a way of reaching intuitive knowledge of the divine and of the meaning of the world, as a gnosis, in short, to be prepared for by ascetic discipline and a religious way of life."[667] The philosopher Pythagoras of modern thinkers was the saviour Pythagoras of Neoplatonic thinkers. Iamblichus interpreted Pythagoras as "a figure sent down from the train of Apollo to save men's souls."[668] Hans Lewy points out that theurgy was only one among many techniques in the repertoire of ancient priests.[669] Frank Klaasen notes that the *Ars Notoria* were more often bound with works of devotion rather than necromancy or natural philosophy; in the same vein Claire Fanger comments on the intermingling of "magical, devotional and mystical elements" in the practice of some medieval Christian priests.[670]

Such a disruption requires the bracketing of judgement. Positioning *DAC* as a text of higher knowledge challenges any assessment based on a classification system juxtaposing good against evil, rational against irrational, efficacious against inefficacious, and original against copy.[671] It permits Kitchen's third position to emerge: not the view from 'the outside' or completely the view from 'the inside,' but somewhere in-between.[672]

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[666] Copenhaver 1992, xxxvii.
[667] Yates 1991, 4.
[668] See note 399.
[669] Lewy 1956, 464.
[670] Fanger, "Medieval Ritual Magic: What It is and Why We Need to Know More About It," viii.
[671] See Appendix A
[672] See note 39.

Standing in this 'in-between' enables me to re-define two concepts. First, I define theurgy as the active means through which humanity attempted to achieve higher knowledge for the purpose of salvation. 'Active means' implies *both* contemplation *and* ritual that relies on *both* human *and* divine will; salvation might include both the salvation of the spirit and the salvation of the body. This definition positions theurgy, and *DAC* as a theurgical text, along side other pursuits and texts of higher knowledge such as religion and philosophy. Second, using *DAC* as my proof text, I define Cabala as a claim to, and methodology of, salvation. Rather than a pale, misguided, and misinterpreted copy of an original Jewish tradition called Kabbalah,[673] this definition allows Cabala to stand separate from but alongside Kabbalah as a continuation of the discourse addressing concerns about salvation.[674] If one understands the goal of the medieval Kabbalists as receiving the secret of the name by cleaving to YHWH through the ritual activities of contemplative prayer and Torah study based on the Hebrew alphabet, then one might argue that Reuchlin did not misunderstand Kabbalah at all.[675]

This position permits a re-assessment of the historiography of Reuchlin that has emphasized his role "as a Judaizer, humanist, or a pre-Reformer [linking Reuchlin

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[673] Dan writes: "Reuchlin's concepts characterized the Kabbalah for centuries to come as an obscure, mysterious doctrine which departs from the ordinary use of language and inhabits instead a bizarre, illogical realm visited only by magicians, visionaries and the superstitious." Joseph Dan, "The Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin and Its Historical Significance," in *The Christian Kabbalah, Jewish Mystical Books and Their Christian Interpreters*, ed. Joseph Dan (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard College Library, 1997) 80.

[674] By defining theurgy as the performance of the *mitzvot* in order to change or heal God, Idel suggests that Cabala moves away from the theurgical aspects of Kabbalah. See, for instance, Idel, "The Magical and Neoplatonic Interpretations of the Kabbalah in the Renaissance," 189, 195-6. On the contrary, Wolfson implies that Reuchlin's Cabala affirmed "an intricate connection between Kabbalah and a theurgical conception of the name" Wolfson, "Language, Secrecy, and the Mysteries of Law: Theurgy and the Christian Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin," 15.

[675] See Wolfson 2005, 209.

with Luther],"[676] rather than as a possible theurgist and cabalist pre-Reformer. Even Rummel in her book on Reuchlin, subtitled *Religious and Social Controversy in Sixteenth-Century Germany* in which she illustrates the different ways one set of 'facts' can be interpreted, [677] includes only a cursory overview of the role of Kabbalah in Reuchlin's life, and suggests that his interest in it was one of Hebrew scholarship rather than religious fervour.[678] This bias in historiography substantially ignores what I consider to be the primary motivation guiding Reuchlin's life – the search for higher knowledge or salvation, and the main reason for Reuchin's courageous stance in his *Gutachten* – the protection of kabbalist literature that he felt provided the answer in contemplative ritual performed by the religious seeker. In challenging interpretations that consider a performative approach to knowledge incomprehensible, and that have therefore discounted the apparent incongruity of a renowned scholar as an advocate of magic, I hope I have contributed to the body of scholarship questioning the notion of the Reformation as the great watershed correcting the irrationalism and misguided beliefs of an earlier era.

The great humanist and scholar may have died a priest. Although it is difficult to know whether this was a formality or a heartfelt desire,[679] I would suspect the latter from a man who wrote:

> For when reading Hebrew I seem to see God Himself speaking when I think that this is the language in which God and the angels have told their minds to man from

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[676] Rummel 2002, 36.

[677] That is the Reuchlin Affair, and the events surrounding it.

[678] Rummel 2002, 15. She does include both the dedicatory letter and conclusion of *DAC* in the extracts of source texts she has chosen to illustrate the Reuchlin Affair.

[679] Spitz, "Reuchlin's Philosophy: Pythagoras and Cabala for Christ," 17, and Rummel 2002, 24-5. Rummel suggests ordination before death was a customary "reaffirmation of one's beliefs and an expression of loyalty to the church."

> on high. And so I tremble in dread and in terror, not, however, without some unspeakable joy.[680]

The tone of *DVM* also corroborates such a conjecture. Zika comments on "the nature of the work as religious ritual, rather than philosophical discourse."[681] Reuchlin as Capnion ended the book by whispering into the ears of his other two characters and swearing them to secrecy stating: "It is not proper to spread these veiled arcane and most secret symbols into the air, but whisper them into the ear."[682] Zika continues in a footnote:

> In this context it is pertinent to refer to the sacerdotal role Reuchlin suggests for himself in the coat of arms which adorns the title-page of the DVM. The *ara Capnionis* with its glowing coals, cords, and bells which allude to the clothing of the Jewish High Priest of Exodus xxvii (see H. Decker-Hauff, 'Bausteine zur Reuchlin Biographie', in *Johannes Reuchlin 1455-1522*, pp. 93-94) seems to point to Reuchlin's conception of the analogy between divine philosopher and high priest, whose role it is to mediate between man and divinity in respect to knowledge and power.[683]

Certainly the tenor of *DAC* changed from religious to philosophic text, in the contemporary understanding of the two terms. But as I have discussed, perhaps this reflected prudence rather than a true change of heart. Reuchlin belonged to two societies, the literary Rhenish Sodality in Heidelberg in the late 1490's, and the *De Salve Regina* Fraternity associated with the Church in Stuttgart in the last years of his

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[680] Johannes Reuchlin, letter of 19 March 1510 in Geiger 1962, no.114, p.123; quoted in Friedman 1983, 73.

[681] Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," 114.

[682] Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," 134.

[683] Zika, "Reuchlin's *De Verbo Mirifico* and the Magic Debate of the Late Fifteenth Century," 136 note 106.

life.[684] Were these groups other than they seemed? There is currently insufficient information to answer the question. However, Zika notes the existence of secret societies by mentioning that Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1536), who lectured on *DVM,* belonged to one.

Only intuition and empathy rather than current factual evidence can support the stance of Reuchlin as theurgist as well as an academic, jurist, linguist, and philosopher. My own experience as both academic and practitioner tells me that it is impossible to draw a boundary between the two. Either personal experience leads to academic exploration, or academic curiosity leads to personal experimentation. I acknowledge that the image of the erudite and well-respected Reuchlin as magician is incongruous. However, the image of Reuchlin as mystic is not. Like Wolfson, I also challenge the boundary that divides theurgy from mysticism. He writes "mystical union and theurgic unification are concurrent processes that have been artificially separate for extraneous taxonomic concerns by contemporary scholars of Kabbalah."[685] But that is a topic for another day!

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[684] Zika, "Reuchlin and Erasmus: Humanism and Occult Philosophy," 239. For information on the Rhenish sodality, see Spitz 1963, 86-7 and Geiger 1964, 41. For Reuchlin's association with Trithemius, and the latter's involvement in the Rhenish sodality see Noel L. Brann, "Humanism in Germany," in *Renaissance Humanism Foundations, Forms and Legacy*, ed. Albert Jr. Rabil, vol. 2, Humanism Beyond Italy (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 125,38 , and Brann 1999, 5-6 . For information on Reuchlin's membership in the Salve Regina Fraternity, see Hansmartin Decker-Hauff, "Bausteine Zur Reuchlin - Biographie," in *Johannes Reuchlin 1455-1522*, ed. Manfred Krebs (Pforzheim: Der Stadt Pforzheim, 1955), 101-2. Of Reuchlin's connection with the Rhenish sodality, Zika writes, "It was from Johannes Dalberg, Bishop of Worms and Chancellor of the University of Heidelberg, who was the patron of the society, that Reuchlin obtained important Jewish and Kabbalistic material." Zika, "Reuchlin and Erasmus: Humanism and Occult Philosophy," 239 note 60.

[685] Wolfson 2005, 210.

Appendices

Appendix A: Hypothetical Binary Complex around Knowledge

Dimensions of Theurgy	**Reasoned[686] Knowledge**	**Magical Knowledge**
Activity	contemplation	ritual
	logic	superstition
	mental/mind	physical/body
	passive	active
Purpose	spiritual	material
Power Source/Will	God	Devil/human
Intent	good	evil
Direction	ascent to heaven	descent to earth
Mediator	Christ/angels	demons/daemons
Dimensions of Religion	religion/theology/	magic
	official	popular
	prayer	incantation
	relic	amulet
	sacrament	sacramental
	orthodox	heretical
	salvation	damnation
Dimensions of Power	educated	uneducated
	elite	masses
Dimensions of Judgement	legitimate	illegitimate
	light	dark
	good	evil
	true	false
	superior	inferior
	rational	irrational
	us	them
	efficacious	inefficacious
	original	copy
	philosophy/science	magic

[686] I use reason rather than intellect to continue the distinction Reuchlin made between *ratio* or reason, through which one could not achieve knowledge of God, and *mens,* sometimes translated as intellect, through which one could.

Appendix B: Hypothetical Binary Complex Constructed by Theurgical Practitioners

Dimensions of Theurgy	**Theurgy vs**	***Goēteia***
Activity	ritual/contemplation	ritual
	mens	superstition
	soul/body	body
	active	active
Purpose	spiritual/material	material
Power Source/Will	God/human	Devil
Intent	good	evil
Direction	ascent to heaven descent to earth	descent to earth
Mediator	Christ/angels/daemons/ natural properties	demons
Dimensions of Religion	religion/theology/ mysticism/philosophy	magic
	salvation	damnation
Dimensions of Power	educated	uneducated
	elite	masses
Dimensions of Judgement	legitimate	illegitimate
	good	evil
	true	false
	superior	inferior
	us	them
	efficacious	inefficacious

Appendix C: Hypothetical Binary Complex around Luther and Reuchlin

Methodology	**Luther**	**Reuchlin**
Activity	contemplation/prayer	contemplation/ritual
	logic	superstition/foolish
	mental/mind	physical/body
	passive	active
Purpose	spiritual	spiritual/material
Power Source/Will	God	Devil/human
Intent	good	misguided/evil
Source	Christianity	Judaism
Mediator	Christ	Christ/angels/demons
Dimensions of Religion	religion/theology	magic
	official	unofficial
	Bible[687]	amulet
	orthodox	heretical
	salvation	damnation
Dimensions of Power	educated	uneducated
	masses	elite
Dimensions of Judgement	legitimate	illegitimate
	light	dark
	good	evil
	true	false
	superior	inferior
	rational	irrational
	us	them
	efficacious	inefficacious

[687] The Bible continued to be used as an amulet after the Reformation. Scribner notes that "the Reformation was neither as radical nor as successful a break with the past as traditional Reformation historiography has led us to believe." Robert W. Scribner, "Incombustible Luther: The Image of the Reformer in Early Modern Germany," *Past & Present* 110 (1986): 68.

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