



STATEMENT DC040

CABALA

by Elliot Miller

Cabala is the name of an occult philosophy and theosophy that developed among Jews in Babylonia, and later Italy, Provence, and Spain, between the sixth and thirteenth centuries A.D.

The word "Cabala" means "to receive," and refers to heavenly revelation received by Jews and passed on to succeeding generations through oral tradition. At first it was used by the mainstream of Judaism, but eventually it became identified with those who believed that the Cabala was an esoteric, occultic tradition that explained the true meaning of the Hebrew Scriptures, which was kept hidden from the masses and only made known to those who were spiritually ready to receive it.

The most basic philosophical presupposition behind Cabala is that the world is an emanation of the spiritual essence of God. God, or "En Sof" (Endless One) is infinite and transcendent, and could make no direct contact with finite beings. The finite creation came into existence when the En Sof voluntarily limited Himself by allowing Himself to become manifest through attributes or emanation (called Sephiroth), listed as Crown, Wisdom, Intelligence, Greatness, Strength, Beauty, Firmness, Splendor, Foundation, and Sovereignty. Each emanation would be further removed from the En Sof, and thus further from God's perfection and transcendence. The Sephiroth would be repeated on four different levels, and these realms, according to descent, were called: "Atziluth" (the world of the supernals, or heavenless), "Briah" (the world of creation), "Yetzirah" (the world of formation), and "Assiah" (the world of material action). Taking on a personal form, these Sephiroth, as angels, served as intermediaries between God and man.

Cabala is classically divided into two systems: theoretical and practical. The theoretical is concerned with theosophical speculation upon God and His attributes, such as what is described above. The practical is concerned with bringing what has been theorized into the realm of everyday experience. This is attempted through prayer, ascetic practices, and the employment of various occult means, such as numerology, talismans, amulets, and incarnation of divine names and words.

Intrinsic to Cabala is the belief that Scripture is inspired, not only in its obvious interpretations, but even to the degree that, through the use of occult symbol interpretation, one could find hidden meaning in the very numerical and alphabetical interpretation of the texts. Thus, the doctrine of the Cabala was derived through study of the Old Testament, albeit, only after occultic interpretative methods had been applied to it.

To give you an historical perspective, Cabala grew out of two basic needs in the Jewish consciousness. Because they had rejected their Messiah, God temporarily rejected the Jewish nation (Luke 13:35), and so, in the centuries that followed, there were no prophets; there was no immediate manifestation of God's presence among the Jewish people. This left them feeling that God was far away and removed from them and made them more prone to be influenced by the philosophical climate of the people in whose lands they dwelt. The overwhelming philosophical influence in areas where Cabala began was Greek; Neo-Platonism and its "Christian" offshoot, Gnosticism. These Platonic philosophies had a very transcendent view of God:

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He is infinite and far removed from any conceivable contact with man. As the Jew assumed an increasingly transcendent view of God, he needed to reconcile this with the traditional Hebrew belief in the immanence and accessibility of God to man. This need seemed to be met best through the doctrine of the Sephiroth, the groundwork of which had already been laid by the Gnostics, and Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish philosopher and contemporary of Christ.

A second reason for Cabala's emergence was that by around the twelfth century, Talmudic legalism, ritualism, and intellectual slavery had reached its peak (the Talmud is the body of writings that seeks to interpret the Law of God contained in Jewish Scripture). Cabala became popular because it opened up an approach to religion that seemed more pleasurable, immediate, and less confining.

What is the Christian response to Cabala? This is an important question because in today's "occult revolution" where all dimensions of the occult are being probed, there has been a revived interest in Cabala among both Jew and Gentile. Although its Jewish origin makes it unique, Cabala is still essentially an occultic system, and thus must be classified among all other occultic systems as being incompatible with the historic Judaeo-Christian faiths. Its theology is essentially pantheistic in that it teaches that all reality springs directly from God's own essence. Even if one believes that these emanations from God's essence have gone through a descent of ten spheres on four different levels, the conclusion is inescapable that even the being on the lowest level is still of one essence with God; and thus, ultimately, he is God. Such a concept is incompatible with the biblical God, who created the world out of nothing, not out of Himself (Gen. 1:1. The Hebrew word for "create" is "bara," which indicates something coming out of nothing.

Although Cabalists' insistence upon the inspiration of Scripture in its literal form was commendable, their carrying this point to the extent of seeking to find hidden meaning in its numerical arrangements was unwarranted. Depending upon one's assumptions, one may apply Cabalistic methods to almost any piece of literature and draw almost any interpretation from it. Cabalistic method of interpretation is neither acknowledged in the Bible, nor justified by it. The application of this method of the Bible had produced interpretations that are not supported by Scripture, and, in fact, are something directly opposed to it, in its obvious context.

In my years of research in comparative religions I have become persuaded that essentially there are only two metaphysical interpretations of reality available to us: the Biblical and the occultic. In seeking to support the inspiration of Scripture, the Jewish Cabalists applied to it a method of interpretation foreign to Scripture, but familiar to the occult, and thus these Jews slipped over from a Biblical understanding of reality to an occultic one.

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