

JEWISH THOUGHT AND SPIRITUALITY

CHRISTIAN INFLUENCES IN THE ZOHAR

by YEHUDAH LIEBES

One of the outstanding features of the Zohar is its receptiveness to ideas from other sources and its ability to adopt them to its own particular style and way of thought. A far-from-negligible factor which facilitated this receptivity was the book's pseudo-epigraphic format, which freed its author from the cares and criticisms of his contemporaries. It therefore should not surprise us that a leading source of such influences on the Zohar was Christianity since, as we know, its author lived in a Christian milieu. In addition, the nature of Christianity as a daughter-religion (or, rather, a sister-religion) of Judaism, an alternative interpretation of a common scriptural tradition, made it all the easier for the two religions to influence one another and for the Zohar to become an expression of this mutual influence.

Needless to say, the Zohar is emphatically a Jewish, not a Christian work. It

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The present text, particularly the scholarly apparatus, has been somewhat abridged, with the author's consent. Deleted passages have been indicated with the sign [. . .]. The interested reader is referred to the Hebrew original for the full text.

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adopted basic concepts from a variety of sources and combined them together, creating an amalgam which presents a complete, albeit diversified, picture of the Jewish religion. In spite of the originality of this picture, there is no mistaking the Jewish spirit that permeates it — that spirit which made it possible for the Zohar to strike such deep roots among the Jewish people, making it a decisive factor in shaping the temper and outlook of Jewish life, particularly during the 16th to 18th centuries. In passing, it should be noted that, although the author of the Zohar allowed himself to be influenced by Christianity, one oughtn't to conclude from this that he was overly fond of the “Gentile Nations”, especially these who professed this religion. Quite the contrary — as will be pointed out below, in note 86.

Thus, there is no basis to the claims of Christian Kabbalists that the Zohar contains Christian beliefs. Those Kabbalists did have a certain ground for their claims, for the Zohar does contain many formulations of Christian origins (of which the Zohar's author was quite conscious); however, in the Zohar these formulations were transformed into an integral part of the Jewish-Kabbalistic world view. In this article I shall present a number of examples of Christian influence found in the Zohar, although the esoteric nature of the material calls for intensive research in order to uncover this influence. I shall begin my examples with a discussion of the doctrine of trinity in the Zohar.

I. The Doctrine of Trinity

It is a well known fact that the Zohar frequently describes the Godhead as a threefold unity, doing so in different ways.¹ The tenfold structure of the Kabbalistic emanations or *sefirot* can actually be fitted into a threefold division, which follows in the main a certain passage from Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer — a passage on which the Zohar often bases itself (see below, note 14) — thus remaining within the realm of traditional Judaism. This notwithstanding, it is my contention that the Christian doctrine of the trinity also influenced the threefold formulations in the Zohar, in addition to the very interest demonstrated by the Zohar in tripartite formulations — in itself due to Christian influence.² I shall illustrate this^{2a} by examining tripartite formulations which the Zohar brings concerning the divine names, *Adonai Eloheynu Adonai*, in the verse “Hear O

1. Some examples of this may be found in the article by Y. Tishbi, “Kudsha-berik̄-hu Orayta ve-Yisrael kola ḥad” (Heb.), *Kiryat Sefer* 50 (1975), pp. 668–674.

2. Nevertheless, threefold formulations are also found in early Hebrew literature and these influenced the Zohar as well. I refer specifically to the striking examples found in Midrash Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva, which is utilized quite extensively by the author of the Zohar. But even this text itself is not entirely free of Christian influence (see below, n. 71). |. . . |

2a. English translation: *The Zohar*, transl., H. Sperling and M. Simon, 5 v. (London: Soncino, 1931–49). III:134.

Israel the Lord our God, the Lord is One” (Deut. 6:4), the verse par excellence proclaiming the unity of God. In the Zohar (II:43b) we read the following:³

Hear, O Israel. *Adonai Eloheinu Adonai* is one. These three are one. How can the three Names be one?⁴ Only through the perception of faith: in the vision of the Holy Spirit, in the beholding of the hidden eye alone.⁵ The mystery of the audible voice is similar to this, for though it is one yet it consists of three elements — fire, air, and water, which have, however, become one in the mystery of the voice. Even so it is with the mystery of the threefold Divine manifestations designated by *Adonai Eloheinu Adonai* — three modes which yet form one unity. This is the significance of the voice which man produces in the act of unification, when his intent is to unify all, from the Infinite (*Ein-Sof*) to the end of creation. This is the daily unification, the secret of which has been revealed in the holy spirit.

Tishbi takes note of this passage and others⁶ when he writes: “It is true that the threefold formulation in the Zohar differs in essence from the Christian Trinity . . . but we should not completely discount the possibility that in spite of his harsh anti-Christian stand, the author of the Zohar was influenced by the formal wording of the mystery of the Godhead within the rival religion.” It is this possibility that I have set out to substantiate here.

First, I should like to point out that there are passages which attempt to prove the validity of the Christian Trinity on the basis of the verse “Hear O Israel” in the book *Pugio Fidei* by Raymond Martini,⁷ a Christian contemporary and fellow countryman of the author of the Zohar, who had never heard of the Zohar, as

3. This passage is not part of the *Raaya Meheimna*, as is indicated in the printed editions, but from the section of *Pikkudin*, written by the author of the main text. See E. Gottlieb, “The *Pikkudin* Passages in the Zohar” (Heb.), in his *Mehkarim be-Sifrut ha-Kabbalah* (Tel-Aviv, 1976), pp. 215–230.

4. In other words, even though one who recites the *Shema* says *Ehad* (One) at the end of the verse, it nevertheless contains three divine names — a fact which cannot be lightly ignored.

5. This is an allusion to a mystical technique of rolling one’s eyes about when they are closed, by which one sees a medley of colors indicating the unity of the different *sefirot* (divine emanations). This technique is mentioned a number of times in the Zohar (for example, in I:42a). For a detailed discussion of this, see my *Perakim be-Milon Sefer ha-Zohar* [Sections of the Zohar Lexicon (Heb.)], Doctoral Dissertation presented to the Hebrew University (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 291–293, 316–317.

6. In his book *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem, 1961), II:279. There he also notes the passage in Zohar III:162a, in which the threefold unity is mentioned in the form of a riddle asked by a heavenly voice, underscoring the significance of the issue and its paradoxical nature. [. . .] See further A. Jellinek, “Christlicher Einfluss auf die Kabbala,” *Der Orient* 12 (1851), pp. 580–583. Jellinek also quotes three trinitarian passages from Moses de Leon’s *Shekel ha-Kodesh*.

7. R. Martini, *Pugio Fidei* (Leipzig, 1687), III:1:3, p. 548 (439). The trinity is also proven there from the verse of the *Kedushah* (i.e., doxology — “Holy Holy Holy” — Isa. 6:3). The Zohar also attaches trinitarian meaning to this verse (although not for the same purpose): see, for example, Zohar III:143b (in the *Idra Rabba*); III:297a; and the quotation in this paper from the *Shekel ha-Kodesh*. See also in Midrash Otiot de-Rabbi Akiba (*op. cit.*, n. 2) based on this verse, to which were then added others, including the *Shema*!

well as in a work quoted by Maimonides in his *Ma'amar Tehiyat ha-Metim* [Essay on the Resurrection of the Dead].

In addition, it should be noted that the author of the Zohar himself, R. Moses de Leon, was aware of the paradox of the threefold unity found in the *Shema* ("Hear O Israel") and its similarity to the Christian principle of trinity. Evidence of this is found in his book *Shekel Ha-Kodesh*,⁸ which concludes with a discussion of the mystery of unity found in *Shema*. This discussion is presented in the context of a fictitious questioner inquiring about the inherent contradiction within the belief in a threefold unity, alluding to the Christian nature of such a belief. Such allusions are to be found, in my opinion, in the following remarks of the questioner: "This matter causes much confusion," and "the one who understands this, trembles with fright lest he commit a transgression by speaking of it." This matter is also referred to in the beginning of the response to the questioner:

For though it is true that no one in the Land of Israel has ever asked this question. . . . For it is just as you said, that a person should guard his words and thoughts from consideration of this lest the foundation (of his faith) collapse and his thoughts bewilder him. Therefore the master of mysteries, may he rest in peace, (i.e., King Solomon, in Eccles. 5:5) taught: "Take care lest your mouth cause you to sin."

It seems to me that in the last words of this passage R. Moses de Leon expressed his apprehension concerning incidences of apostasy grounded in Kabbalistic studies which occurred in his own day, such as the case of R. Abner of Burgos. In *Shekel Ha-Kodesh*, he writes:

Question: You have already discussed⁹ the mystery of unity and the mystery of *Adonai Eloheinu Adonai*,¹⁰ speaking of the mystery of unity as regards these three names. And you have also spoken of the mystery of holiness found in the holy triad, "Holy, holy, holy (Isaiah 6:3)." Even though all this is fine and good, would it not have been proper to demonstrate God's unity, in the mystery of its quality and knowledge, through negation¹¹ alone, saying only "God is one," as is found in the mystery "God will be one" (Zechariah 14:9). Likewise, in the verse ". . . Holy is the Lord of Hosts," why is "Holy" found three times? Is this not a very confusing matter? Although there is truth to be found¹² in the matters you have raised, it is still difficult to come to terms with them. The person who understands them, fears and trembles lest he commit a transgression by speaking of them; and, therefore, he places a harness on his mouth. And then again if, as you suggest, you will find out that these things are as you thought, why are not the ten emanations three, just as the mystery of unity is threefold . . .

8. London, 1911, p. 131.

9. The term התעוררות is used quoted frequently in the Hebrew writings of R. Moses de Leon as well as appearing in the Aramaic of the Zohar, in such phrases as "the friends awakened" (i.e., were aroused spiritually).

10. Earlier in the same work, in the chapter entitled *Sha'ar Helek ha-Yihud*, esp. pp. 99, 104.

11. The use of the term *nishlal* here is unclear. It may refer to that which negates multiplicity, like the negative attributes of the philosophers, or it may be used in the sense of "naked, without covering" (as in *sholal*, Mic. 1:8), here meaning "simple, unique."

12. Based on Isa. 59:15.

It is interesting to note that R. Moses de Leon also grapples in the above passage with the problematics of the ten *sefirot* — why they are not threefold as is the Unity of God (and not only why they are not considered one — a philosophical question) — apparently because the tripartite formulations were of such obvious importance to him. Indeed, in writing his response to the questioner in his work confirming the unity of three,¹³ de Leon also responds to this latter question:

And as to what you have said concerning the *sefirot* (divine emanations), that they are ten and not three or more, you have made your point very clear. Nevertheless, all the *sefirot* are contained within the mystery of the triune singularity, as our sages teach us (Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, 3): “The world was created through ten sayings, and of three are they comprised — wisdom, understanding and knowledge¹⁴ — forming a single source of reality”. (*ibid.*, p. 134)

Indeed, Abner of Burgos also relied on this triad of wisdom, understanding and knowledge, in order to verify the authenticity of the Christian trinity. Y. Baer, in referring to Abner’s words,¹⁵ drew a parallel between them and the words of the Zohar in the Midrash ha-Ne’alam in Zohar Hadash to Genesis (Mossad Ha-Rav Kook edition, 4a) and in III:290a–b (Idra Zuta), and the commentary of R. Azriel of Gerona on the passage in his *Commentary to the Aggadoth*, claiming that not only could such (trinitarian) quotes be used for Christological interpretations, “but that the aforementioned Kabbalist writers had made use of the idea of the Christian Trinity in their works.”

Further study of these matters is sufficient to call for a reevaluation of the work of Christian Kabbalists. It is clear that they frequently falsified quotes from Jewish Kabbalistic sources, but our appraisal of how much truth or fiction is to

13. In one of Moses de Leon’s explanations of the paradoxical unity of the three upper *sefirot* (*ḥokhmah, binah, da’at*), he states: “God is one and is not three except from our vantage point” (*Shekel ha-Kodesh, op. cit.*, p. 132). R. Azriel of Gerona explained the distinction between these three elements in an identical manner (apparently borrowed from the doctrine of the divine attributes found in medieval Jewish philosophy — see Maimonides’ *Guide to the Perplexed*, I:61). In his *Perush ha-Aggadoth*, ed., Tishbi (Jerusalem, 1945), p. 84, he states: “Wisdom, intuition and knowledge are separate qualities only insofar as finite beings perceive them.”

14. In the source in Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer, the text reads “understanding” (*tevunah*) and not “intuition” (*binah*), following the Hebrew wording in Prov. 3:19 and Ex. 31:3. Moses de Leon apparently chose the term *binah* because of its use in Kabbalistic literature [. . . See, e.g., Zohar II:14b; III:127b–128a.] The many implications of this passage are discussed at length in my article, “The Messiah of the Zohar — The Messianic Image of Simeon bar Yoḥai” (Heb.), in *ha-Ra’ayon ha-Meshiḥi be-Yisrael* (Jerusalem, 1982) [below: “The Messiah”], pp. 130–131 and n. 182. Cf. below, n. 23.

15. In his article, “The Kabbalistic Doctrine in the Christological Teaching of Abner of Burgos” (Heb.), *Tarbiz* 27 (1958), p. 281. See below, n. 28. Incidentally, a similar trinity, based upon Kabbalistic speculation on lovingkindness, judgment and mercy (*ḥesed, din, raḥamim*) is found in the writings of a Christian polemicist, quoted in *Sefer Nizāḥon Yashan*, ed. M. Breuer (Ramat Gan, 1978), p. 29. See the editor’s note there, and below, n. 56.

be found in these passages must change once we acknowledge that some of the passages from the Zohar on which they based themselves really do show signs of Christian influence. In passing, one should note that the most persuasive argument of Christian Kabbalah was the fact that there were Jews who claimed Jesus came to the mystery of the trinity by way of the Kabbalah. (See G. Scholem's article on the beginning of Christian Kabbalah [below, n. 16], p. 178f.). In addition, it is quite possible that in those few places where the Zohar text of the Christian Kabbalists is more Christological than that found in Jewish hands, the original formulations were preserved by the Christians, while the Jewish copyists either expunged or softened them, for obvious reasons.

This was the case, in my opinion, in the passage on the mystery of unity found in the *Shema*, quoted by Gershon Scholem¹⁶ from the writings of the apostate Paul de Heredia. Y. Tishbi, in alluding to the threefold formulations in the Zohar¹⁷ which we mentioned above, has already noted: "According to the findings and formulations in the Zohar which I have clarified here, we can now better understand how the Christianized passage on the mystery of unity in the *Shema* by Paul de Heredia came about." However, in my opinion one can even go one step further. Careful scrutiny of de Heredia's quote shows that it is really an expunged passage from the Zohar, nowhere preserved by Jewish hands. G. Scholem, in the article mentioned above, claimed that this passage was very cleverly forged, far more so than any other Christian texts, such as *Iggeret HaSodot* and *Galei Rezaya* (for which reason I raise no doubts as to the forgery of these two works). Scholem also notes that, from the conspicuous linguistic usages of the Latin text, one can discern that this is a translation of a passage originally written in the language and style of the Zohar. However, my conclusions concerning this "forgery" go far beyond those of Scholem, and I shall now elucidate the reasons for this claim.

For one, I find it difficult to believe that there was in the Middle Ages such an expert forger that the linguistic style of the Zohar would be apparent even in a Latin translation of his work (this based on my familiarity with several forgers of the Zohar, from the earliest, such as the author of *Tikkunei Zohar* and R. Joseph of Shushan, to the more recent, such as M.H. Luzzatto — all of whose forgeries are readily detected, because they did not succeed in accurately imitating the language of the Zohar). Secondly, this passage contains a certain detail (itself somewhat unclear) that adds nothing to its Christian intent, but is evidently connected to other passages in the Zohar discussing the same topic. I refer to the phrase *mensura vocis*, the Latin term by which our passage denotes the third

16. In his article, "Zur Geschichte der Anfänge der christlichen Kabbala," *Essays Presented to Leo Bäck* (London, 1954), p. 183.

17. *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (op. cit., n. 6), n. 92.

member of the trinity — the Holy Spirit.¹⁸ While I could not trace the exact source of this term to the Zohar (its Aramaic equivalent *shi'ura de-kola* appears nowhere in the Zohar)¹⁹ the idea that the three divine qualities are contained in sound (i.e., the voice of one reciting the *Shema*) is found in the Zohar. This concept was noted earlier in this paper (above n. 6) and is also found in several places in the writings of Moses de Leon²⁰ in connection with the symbolism of voice and speech which is developed so elaborately in both the Zohar and in his writings.²¹ The connection between this voice and the Holy Spirit is also found in the Zohar passage alluded to previously — one can comprehend the unity within the three by means of voice and the Holy Spirit. Similarly, one finds in the writings of Moses de Leon:²² “The Holy Spirit is speech activated by the voice.”²³

In the passage cited by Heredia, we find strong emphasis placed upon the mystery surrounding the second element of the Trinity — the son. While it is true that there is no reason to doubt the Christian origin of this element, in my opinion the use of this element in no way implies a forgery. It is quite possible that these words came from the author of the Zohar himself, for allusions to such concepts are to be found in other passages of the book, as we shall see further on in this study. But first let me remark that even at this point we do have a partial proof of the authenticity of this passage: the very beginning of Heredia’s passage does appear in extant editions of the Zohar in III:263a.²⁴ In this Zohar passage, concerning the first of the three divine names in the verse *Shema’ Yisrael*, we have the following statement: “And this is called the father.” While it is true that the term “father” is regularly applied in the Zohar to the *sefirah* of *hokhmah* (wisdom), as it is clearly alluded to here, it is nevertheless unusual for the Zohar to simply enumerate the different names of the divine spheres unless they fit within a specific framework of discourse. Thus, only if we assume that Heredia’s addition referring to “son” is authentic will the use of the term “father” seem appropriate within this discourse.

18. *Spiritus sanctus* in the Latin. However, this formulation (as noted by Scholem, *op. cit.*, n. 16) is only quoted by Galatinus. In another version of the text, one finds the variant *Spiritus almus*, meaning “the spirit which nurtures.” [. . .]

19. Perhaps his version came about through a mistaken reading of קולא for כולא. [. . .]

20. As in *Shekel ha-Kodesh*, *op. cit.*, p. 50, 104, 118.

21. See, e.g., Zohar I:50b. Cf. G. Scholem, “Two Tractates by R. Moses de Leon” (Heb.), *Kobez al Yad* 8 |18| (1976), pp. 335, 343, 370, 375, 376.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 343.

23. Here, the author is more specific in distinguishing between “voice” (*Kol* — symbolizing the *sefirah* of *Tiferet* or *Da’at*) and “speech” (*dibbur*), symbolizing *Malkhuth*, referred to as “the Holy Spirit.” However, on p. 340 he refers to *Malkhut* as an “echo of a voice” (*bat-kol*) and not as itself a voice [. . . On *bat-kol*, see BT Yoma 9a]

24. Heredia cites this passage in the name of R. Yiba and not of R. Yissa, as it is in the printed editions of the Zohar. Recanati in his Commentary on the Torah, Deut. 6:4, also quotes the passage from R. Yiba.

Moreover, it seems to me that if someone wishes to falsify a document, he will forge an entire passage, so as not to be caught in the act of falsifying material, rather than attach a forged section to an authentic passage. This is so especially after we have noted that there are other passages in the Zohar discussing the triune qualities of the *Shema*, which the forger certainly would have known (It is hard to imagine that his forgery just happened to chance on the same idea that appears in the Zohar in these places). Why Heredia didn't hinge his forgery on one of these passages, which would have suited his purposes better than the one in question — a passage discussing five elements rather than the three found in the *Shema* — is a serious question to ponder.

All these considerations have convinced me that the passage Heredia brings is an authentic Zohar passage, which was apparently later abridged because of its Christian connotation and then woven into another discourse on the *Shema*. This change was very likely made by the author of the Zohar himself, who was frightened by his own daring after the first version of his work had been disseminated. Other such instances of this phenomenon — different recensions of the same passage, all written by the author of the Zohar — have been well attested.²⁵

Let us now focus on the subject of the “Son” found in Heredia’s passage commenting on the second name of God (*Elohenu*) in the *Shema*. Heredia writes:

Elohenu id est deus noster²⁶ profunditas fluminum et fons scientiarum²⁷ quae procedunt ab illo patre et filius vocatur.²⁸ Ait aut rabbi Symeon: hoc arcanum filii non revelabitur unicuique quosquam venerit messias ut ait Isaias cap. XI.²⁹ Quia repleta erit terra scientia dei sicut aquae maris operientes.

Is it possible that these words, shrouding the concept of the Son within a mystery not to be revealed until the advent of the Messiah, could have been written by the author of the Zohar? I would think so. First of all, the style permeating the Latin “translation” is definitely that of the Zohar. We find similar expressions in the Zohar in different contexts (not about the “Son”), but worded differently enough to suggest that the Heredia passage is authentic, not something copied from

25. See G. Scholem, “A New Passage from the Midrash ha-Neelam of the Zohar” (Heb.), *Louis Ginzberg Jubilee Volume* [Hebrew Volume] (New York, 1946), p. 425 ff. In my article, “The Messiah” (*op. cit.*, n. 14), p. 163, n. 273, I pointed out that even the printed text of the Zohar includes within it different editions of the same work.

26. This is not part of the passage, but a literal translation of the Hebrew *Elohenu*.

27. Based on Zohar III:263a.

28. The word *binah* alluded to here is associated in the Zohar with *ben* (son), as it is by Abner of Burgos in its Christian connotation (above, n. 15). [. . . Cf. Zohar II:123b and 290a–b.]

29. Verse 9.

another place in the Zohar, but rather a passage sharing authentic stylistic traits with the Zohar, even to the extent of employing the verse from Isaiah in the same manner. Thus, for example, we find in Zohar II:68a: “But the words of the Master will light up the world until the Messianic king comes, as it is written: ‘And the Earth shall be filled with the knowledge of God . . .’ (Isa. 11:9).” Similar passages are found in Zohar III:23a and III:236b, the latter referring specifically to the Shema³⁰.

II. The Son

In certain sections of the Zohar the subject of the son is presented as a matter that is obscure and indecipherable. In Zohar I:3b we find the following passage:

“In the beginning” (*bereshith*): this is the key which encloses the whole and which shuts and opens. Six gates are controlled by this key which opens and shuts. At first it kept the gates closed and impenetrable; this is indicated by the word *bereshith*, which is composed of a revealing word (*shith*) with a concealing word (*bera*). *Bera* is always a word of mystery, closing and not opening. Said R. Jose: Assuredly it is so, and I have heard the Sacred Lamp³¹ say the same, to wit, that *bera* is a term of mystery, a lock without a key, and as long as the world was locked within the term *bera* it was not in a state of being or existence. Over the whole there hovered *Tohu* (chaos), and as long as *Tohu* dominated, the world was not in being or existence. When did that key open the gates and make the world fruitful?³² It was when Abraham appeared, as it is written,³³ “These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth *Behibaream*” (When they were created). Now,³⁴ *Be-hibaream* is an anagram of *Be-Abraham* (through Abraham), implying that what was hitherto sealed up and unproductive in the word *BERA* has by a transposition of letters become serviceable, there has emerged a pillar³⁵ of fruitfulness: for *BeRA* has been transformed into *AiBeR* (organ), which is the sacred foundation on which the world rests.

(English: *op. cit.*, I:14)

30. It follows from many passages in the Zohar that the generation of the Messiah to whom R. Simeon bar Yoḥai refers in saying that at that time it will be permitted to divulge the mysteries of the Torah is none other than that of R. Moses de Leon, the true author of the Zohar, to whom these words — uttered at the beginning of the Exile, and whose hidden meaning sustained the Jewish people throughout their exile — were purportedly revealed. I discussed this subject at length in my article, “The Messiah” (*op. cit.*, n. 14).

31. *Bozina Kadisha*, the usual designation for Simeon bar Yoḥai. On this term, see my dissertation (*op. cit.*, n. 5), pp. 139–140.

32. *le-shimusha* — i.e., *tashmish*, sexual intercourse.

33. Gen. 2:4.

34. Genesis Rabba 12:9.

35. *Amuda* (pillar) — the *sefirah* of *yesod*, according to the Kabbalistic interpretation (beginning with *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. R. Margolioth [Jerusalem, 1978], par. 102) of the saying in BT Haggigah 12b: “The world stands upon one pillar, and *Ẓaddik* is its name, as is written, ‘The righteous (*Ẓaddik*) is the foundation of the world.’” These ideas became interchangeable in Kabbalistic literature with the flesh and blood *Ẓaddik* and it is difficult to differentiate between them. [...] The pillar is of course identified with the male sexual organ — the specific symbol of the *sefirah* of *yesod* — and thus connected with the word *eber* (organ) which is spelled with the letters of the word *bara* (created) in reverse order, which are also the opening letters of the name Abraham. [...] On Abraham and his relation to *yesod*, see below, n. 41.

What we have here is another version of the myth regarding “the Holy One who creates worlds and destroys them,”³⁶ or how the Holy One desired at first to create his world using only the quality of strict judgement as its foundation, but after deliberation added to it the quality of mercy.³⁷ This idea is developed in the *Idrot*, as in Zohar III:128a, referring to Genesis 36:3: “And these are the kings that ruled in the land of Edom before a king reigned over the children of Israel”. Here, however, the idea is developed quite differently. The word *Bereshith* is the *sefirah* of wisdom³⁸ containing within it the letters of the word *Bara* and *shith*³⁹ (Aramaic for six). The *sefirah* of *hokhmah* (which at times can be referred to as the father) can be conceived as a key that can open the womb of the *sefirah* of *binah* (intuition — the “mother”), causing her to give birth and replenish the emanations sustaining the existence of the world expressed by the word *Shith*. These emanations are the six *sefirot* from *hesed* to *yesod*, indicated by the Hebrew letter *Vav* of the divine name (it goes without saying that the key here is clearly a phallic symbol). However, the key in the passage is not only capable of opening but also shutting, a condition somehow signified by the word *Bara*. Why the word *Bara* closes rather than opens is a mystery left unexplained by the Zohar. Instead, it prefers to rely on the statement of “the Sacred Lamp” — R. Simeon bar Yoḥai (the same R. Simeon mentioned in Heredia’s passage, on whose authority the son is also declared an indecipherable mystery). At the start of creation, the “key” chose to use the second option — *Bara* (*bara* appears twice in Genesis 1:1 — once internally within the word *bereshith*, sharing the same first letters in the Hebrew, and secondly as a separate word following the word *bereshith* within the verse) — and thereafter followed a period of *tohu* (chaos), characterized by barrenness.⁴⁰ This period also coincides with the generations preceding the patriarch Abraham, for upon his⁴¹ birth the six (*shith*) emanations mentioned above emerged, causing the letters of the word *bara* to rearrange themselves into the word *eiber*: organ — the male reproductive organ and also the first Hebrew letters forming Abraham’s name.

What is the meaning of this word *bera* and why is it considered a “term of mystery”? It seems possible that the reason why the Zohar surrounds this topic

36. Genesis Rabba 3:8.

37. Genesis Rabba 12:15. Both here and in the Zohar passage, the repair of the condition is alluded to in the same verse, Gen. 2:4.

38. The Targum Yerushalmi translates the word *bereshith* in Gen. 1:1 as “with wisdom.”

39. See, for example, the beginning of Midrash Aggadah, ed. Buber (Vienna, 1894). There the letters of the word *Bereshith* are also discussed in various other combinations.

40. Compare the description in Zohar II:103a of the *siṭra aḥra* (other [i.e., sinister] side) as unable to procreate. See below, n. 46.

41. Abraham’s main attribute is *hesed* (lovingkindness) which is, however, realized and revealed in the *sefirah* of *yesod*. For this reason Abraham had to be circumcised for his self-completion (see Zohar III:142a, in the *Idra Rabba*). See above, n. 35.

with such a veil of secretiveness, identical to that which surrounds the mystery of the son in Heredia's passage, is because both passages may hint at the same subject: the Hebrew word *bara* is also the Aramaic word for son (*bera*). The correctness of such an interpretation of *bera* in the above passage from the Zohar can be shown by a parallel passage in the *Sifra di-Tseniutha*. This book (also by the author of the Zohar) is, as its name suggests, an "arcane text" of hidden lore which consists entirely of anonymous laconic and indecipherable statements. A major portion of these statements are explained in the *Idroth* however, the quote referred to above which we are about to examine in depth is not discussed in that work. Nonetheless, this passage is clearly parallel to the one found in the Zohar. The two passages complement and clarify one another and, as the word *bara* is interpreted as son in the *Sifra-de-Tseniutha*, we can readily apply this interpretation to our cryptic Zohar passage as well.

We read the following in the beginning of the fifth chapter of the *Sifra di-Tseniutha* (Zohar II:178b): "'*Bereshith bara,*' *Bereshith* — a separate statement, *bara* — half a statement; father and son; concealed and revealed." This cryptic passage can readily be deciphered on the basis of the Talmudic passage (Rosh HaShanah 32a) — "'*Bereshith*' is also a statement (one of the ten by which God created the universe)" — for if *Bereshith* is considered a complete statement, then *bara*, which is half of that word, must be half of one statement used to create the world. The rest of this cryptic statement may then be readily understood, based on the parallel Zohar passage from I:3b: "Concealed and revealed" refers to the two halves of the word *bereshith* — *bera* = concealed; *shith* = revealed. Father and son are therefore *bereshith* and *bera*, for *bereshith* is the *sefirah* of *ḥokhmah* known as the father, while *bera*, according to its Aramaic reading, is the son⁴² — confirming and complementing my interpretation of the parallel Zohar passage.

Further examination of this sentence from the *Sifra di-Tseniutha* calls to mind other associations. The relationship found here between the two "statements" (a whole and a half) and "concealed and revealed" reminds one of the Talmudic discussion on the two forms of the letter *mem* found within the Hebrew alphabet. We are told in Shabbat 104a that: "An open *mem* and a closed *mem* represent an open (revealed) statement and a closed (concealed) statement." On these words, Rashi comments: "'An open statement and closed statement' — this refers to matters which one may discuss, and matters which one is commanded to leave closed, such as the mystic speculations on the Divine Chariot." Since the son

42. This acknowledgement that the *bara* preceding Abraham is the "son" reminds one of Jesus' (the Christian "son") statement in John 8:58: "Before Abraham was born, I am." Compare also the Kabbalistic thesis of Picco della Mirandola based on this verse, on which see H. Wirszubski, *Mekubal Nozri korey ba-Torah [A Christian Kabbalist Reads the Torah (Heb.)]* (Jerusalem, 1977), pp. 19–21.

referred to in the *Sifra di-Tseniutha* is these closed/concealed statements, we have here yet another source shedding light on the aura of mystery surrounding the son in Heredia's passage — a definite parallel to the mystic speculations on the Divine Chariot.

Still another association comes to mind regarding the "son" and the closed *mem*, which is explained in the Talmud as a closed statement (*Ma'amar sagur*). If this association or allusion is really present in the text, then its origin is most assuredly Christian: for Christians interpreted the closed, final letter form of the Hebrew letter *mem* in the middle of a word found in Isaiah 9:6 as signifying the closed womb of the Virgin from which Jesus had issued. This interpretation is to be found in the Christian work *Pugio Fidei* (see n. 7),⁴³ a work from the same general area and period in which the Zohar was written, but whose author had no knowledge of it whatsoever. Within this Christian work, the subject of the son of the virgin is connected to the Talmudic passage referring to the "closed statement." This, then, may represent yet another source for why the son is referred to as "half-a-statement" and as closed.

The Zohar's view on this matter becomes clearer if we recall that the closed form of the *mem* is the symbol of the barren male (according to *Sefer Ha-Bahir*⁴⁴) representing the *sefirah* of *binah* (called the masculine world in Zohar passages such as II:101b) when its womb is closed and barren (see Zohar III:156b). The picture becomes even clearer if we recall that *bara* in Zohar I:3b, when described as closed and barren, also relates back to *binah*, as does the son in Heredia's passage (see n. 28). This *sefirah* (referred to as freedom and the world to come) has many eschatological associations throughout Kabbalistic literature and its relationship to the son may in part explain why the mystery of the son will not be revealed until the advent of the Messiah (as stated in Heredia's passage).

Moreover, the closed *mem* found in Isaiah 9:6 is not only interpreted in Messianic terms by the Christians, but in the Talmud as well (Sanhedrin 94a), where its closed character is seen to signify the hidden date of the end of days. In the Zohar (III:156b) we find a similar statement that the *men* of Isaiah 9:6 was closed at the time of the destruction of the Temple and will only be reopened at the time of

43. A Christological interpretation along these lines was also prevalent in later periods. See the 16th century work by Yair ben Shabbetai, *Hervev Pipyoth* (Jerusalem, 1958), 3rd question, p. 18. See also the editor's note there by Y. Rosenthal, which refers to the words of Nicholas de Lyra (13th–14th cent.) and Joshua Lorki (15th cent.). Cf. G. Scholem (*op. cit.*, n. 16), p. 187, who cites a similar interpretation in the writings of Galatinus (15th–16th cent.)

44. Ed. Margolioth, sec. 84–86. This passage was also cited by R. Azriel in his *Perush ha-Aggadoth* (see n. 13), p. 50, in connection with the idea of redemption.

redemption. This condition of destruction and exile, as it relates back to the closed *mem*, is parallel, I feel, to the period of *Tohu* (chaos) signified by *bera* in the Zohar passage examined previously. If we accept this, *Tohu* (chaos) then not only refers back to the generations prior to Abraham, but signifies Israel's condition of exile up to the Messianic era.⁴⁵ It is even possible that the time of exile is marked as the time of the son, since the exile signifies Christian domination under a regime whose god is the son. The theme of barrenness connected with the 'son' (the closed *bera* that is barren as opposed to the *eiber*-male reproductive organ) may possibly allude to the Christian monastic ideal, to which the Zohar is absolutely opposed.⁴⁶ From this, we can more readily understand how the idea of the Messiah who splits open the closed womb of the Shekhina signified by the closed letter *Mem* developed in later Kabbalistic thinking — an idea which had its beginnings in the Zohar,⁴⁷ in which Midrashic, Kabbalistic and Christological speculations were combined. These Christological speculations were however used by the Zohar to convey something quite the opposite of their original intent: in the Zohar the time of the "son" is definitely not the Messianic era; on the contrary, it refers to the period of exile. The "son" is seen as defective and marred by barrenness, while the Messiah is a transformed version of this "son" (*eiber* (organ) instead of *bera*⁴⁸) who will in the future cure this defect. We can perhaps trace here ideas influenced by Joachim of Fiore, who awaited a Messianic period of the Holy Spirit which was to come only at the conclusion of his own times, the period of the son. The splitting open of the closed letter *mem* in the Messianic era is comparable to the transformation of the "closed/concealed" to the "open/revealed" described in the terminology of the

45. As mentioned above, the period of *tohu* (chaos) is connected with the "kings who ruled in Edom before there ruled a king in Israel," (Gen. 36:31) which is applied to the Christian rule during Israel's exile (usually referred to as "the Kingdom of Edom"), until "a king reigns in Israel" (i.e., the Messianic ruler). I discussed this at length in my article "The Messiah . . ." (*op. cit.*, n. 14), pp. 194–197.

46. On this, see the Zohar passage mentioned above, n. 40, in which one who fails to fulfill the commandment "be fruitful and multiply" is severely criticized. This sin is the cause of all evil, in the view of the author of the Zohar, causing great harm in the supernal realms. He who does not procreate is as though he were devoted to "an other god," the eunuch who does not beget (the "other side" and perhaps also the god of Christian monastic life? Compare Zohar I:204b where Gentile rule is referred to as "other" and their god as "the other god"). See further n. 70.

47. The various forms taken by this idea (which lowers the position of the sealed *mem* from the *sefirah* of *binah* to that of *malkhuth*) in Lurianic Kabbalah and afterwards in the Sabbatean movement are discussed at length in my article, "Zaddik as the Foundation of the World — A Sabbatean Myth" (Heb.), *Da'at* 1 (1978), pp. 103–105. | . . . |

48. For a full discussion of the Messianic conceptions associated with the *sefirah* of *Yesod* in the Zohar (and in the circle of 13th century Castilian Kabbalists), see my article, "The Messiah..." (*op. cit.*, n. 14), pp. 120–128. On this theme in later Kabbalah, see my article "Zaddik . . ." (*op. cit.*), esp. pp. 77–78.

Sifra di-Tseniutha. Here too we find an allusion to the idea that all of the Torah's secrets will be revealed in Messianic times.⁴⁹ Another expression of this theme is the transformation of *bera* to *eiber* in Zohar I:3b. This theme is also similar to that found in the mending and subsequent revealing of the letter *Zaddi*, in I:2b, which shall be examined later in this study; all of this can also be seen as parallel to the idea found in Heredia's passage that the mysteries of the "son" will be revealed in Messianic days (i.e., the "repair" of the son and his emergence from concealment to revelation).

However, there is still more to this *mélange* of motifs and associations. An additional association forces itself upon us when examining the aforementioned quote from the *Sifra di-Tseniutha*. One reading this sentence which connects the "son" with the words or statements God used to create the world and the word *bereshith* (in the beginning) can not ignore the echoes in this passage of the opening words of the Gospel of John. "In the beginning there was the word (Gk., *λογος*) and the word was of God and God was the word." Later in the same chapter (1:14) the word is even identified as the "son". The opening phrase of John's Gospel bears an obvious parallel to the first words of the Torah — "In the beginning God created" — and it would have been astounding if Christians had not tried to draw some correspondence in content between the verses. This connection could easily have been made by interpreting the word *bara* in Genesis 1:1 according to its Aramaic rendering — son — especially if they utilized the statement of the rabbis discussed previously: "'In the beginning' (i.e., the word *bereshith*) is also a statement (by which God created the world)."⁵⁰ This interpretation would have carried even more weight had Christians added to it the Talmudic passage which designated the closed final *mem* as a "closed statement" along with their own understanding of this letter as representing the womb of the virgin, as mentioned above.

It was only a short time after these associations occurred to me upon reading the statement in *Sifra di-Tseniutha* that I came across a passage written by a Christian thinker some one hundred years before the time of the Zohar which includes all the above mentioned elements: the comparison drawn between Genesis 1:1 and the Johannine Gospel, the Aramaic connotation of *bar(a)* in Genesis 1:1, and the idea of the "son" as a closed or even an "abridged statement" — parallel to the *Sifra di-Tseniutha*'s "half a statement" — born of a closed womb, albeit the Christological connection between the closed *mem* as the

49. This idea, which is extremely widespread in the Zohar and in the Kabbalah generally, is discussed at length in my article (*op. cit.*, n. 14), pp. 170–174. It is also related with that of the new Torah to be revealed in the Messianic future — on which see below, n. 71.

50. Rosh Hashanah 32a. [...]

womb and the closed statement is not explicitly stated in this text. I refer to a passage in Alexander Neckam's book *De Naturis Rerum*.⁵¹ There is no need to assume that the author of the Zohar knew of this book or drew material from it, for Neckam was far from the originator of these exegeses. Even if Neckam did know some Hebrew,⁵² he certainly could not have known enough in order to compose such complex literary connections which require a clear command of the Jewish sources and the ability to deal with them adequately. I personally do not doubt in any way that these interpretations reached Neckam through written sources, sources which, as such or in variant terms, were also known to the author of the Zohar. The distance between Neckam's England and Spain makes it hard to imagine that there was any direct influence, although it is possible that Neckam may have come across sources for his writings while in France where, we are told in the editor's introduction to his book, he spent some time before writing this book.

The first chapter of *De Naturis Rerum* discusses the correlations between the opening verses of Genesis and those of John's Gospel⁵³ in the same manner as was suggested above. The openings of both books are not seen as contradictory but as complementary to one another: according to one, the "son" is from the "father" while, according to the other, the father is found in the son. These two claims both represent scriptural truth in Neckam's eyes.⁵⁴ He even cites the "Holy Spirit" as secretly alluded to in both these passages.

After a length discourse on these ideas, Neckam substantiates them by interpreting the various combinations of the Hebrew letters found in the word *bereshith* (in the beginning): *Ab* (father), *bar* (son), *esh* (fire = Holy Spirit) and *yesh* (existence). He even interprets the final letter *Tav* as signifying the cross,⁵⁵ among other things.⁵⁶ We are, however, concerned here primarily with the following passage concerning the son:

51. i.e., "On the Nature of Things." London, 1863, ed. Thomas Wright.

52. See R. Loewe, "Alexander Neckam's Knowledge of Hebrew," *Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 4 (1958), pp. 17–28.

53. This already follows from the title of the first chapter of his book: "Reductio principii Johannis ad initium Geneseos" — i.e., Matching the beginning (or, principle) of the Gospel of John with the opening of the Book of Genesis.

54. *Ibid.* (*op. cit.*, n. 51), p. 4. [...]

55. *Ibid.*, p. 9. This view originated in the early centuries of Christianity. [...] For a full discussion of the Hebrew letter *tav* as a symbol for the Cross, and the various sources and ramifications of this symbolism, see the Hebrew text of this note.

56. Such as the sentence *אשרי בה אשרי* which in his opinion refers to the Virgin Mary (the

... et habebis *bar*, quod apud nos idem est fulius. Ecce quonammodo in principio Geneseos est *verbum inclusum*. Verbum igitur quod omnia continet duabus litteris inclusum est. ad disignandum quia *in utero beatissimae Virginis erat abbreviandum verbum* quod pro nobis abbreviatum est. (pp. 7–8)

Here are all the elements found in the sentence from the *Sifra di-Tseniutha*. *Bar* (son) is found within *Bereshith* and is designated as a closed statement. This “statement” is interpreted by Neckam as the Virgin’s womb and is certainly connected with the closed *mem* identified in the Talmud as a “closed statement.” All these elements are seen as interrelated in much the same fashion as Raymond Martini viewed them. There is even a christological parallel to the expression “half a statement” found in the *Sifra di-Tseniutha*: the statement (the son — Jesus) had to be limited (*erat abbreviandum*) within the virgin womb. [This expression has a long history in Christian theology beginning in Romans 9:28 where Paul quotes Isaiah 10:23 — “for a decree of annihilation has the Lord of Hosts carried out in the Land.” The Hebrew words כְּלֵה וְנִחְרַצָּה translated by the English “decree of annihilation” were rendered in New Testament Greek *logon* . . . *syntemnon* coming down to us in their Latin form in the Vulgate as *verbum* . . . *breuiatum* (in some textual versions the participle is active and in others passive). What results from all this is the following understanding of the verse from Isaiah: “An abridged statement will God bring to earth.” Certainly, Paul himself never suggested such a reading, but some of the later Church fathers interpreted the “abridged statement” as an allusion to Jesus as the *logos*.^{56a}] Also of interest is another explanation given by Neckam in his grammatical treatment of the term “a closed statement” (*verbum inclusum*). This phrase may also be translated as “a closed word” (*verbum*, as does the Greek word *logos*, has both these connotations), and according to Neckam “every word consisting of two letters (such as *Bar* — son) is a closed matter.” One would surmise that the source of Neckam’s statement was some work on Hebrew grammar from

presence of the word *ashrey* within the letters of *Bereshith* is also mentioned in *Tikkunei Zohar*, sec. 13, while *bat* is found there at the beginning of sec. 19). This method of dividing the word *Bereshith* into its separate components is already found in the Midrash Aggadah (op. cit., n. 39), and is a set feature of the *Tikkunei Zohar*. (It is also present in R. Issac ibn Latif. See Wilensky [below, n. 58], p. 216).

An interpretation particularly close to that of Neckam’s is found in *Sefer ha-Ziruf* (a work contemporary with the Zohar), a Latin translation of which was known to Picco della Mirandola, who himself engaged in such combinations. See H. Wirszubski, *Sheloshah Perakim be-Toldot ha-Kabbalah ha-Nozrit* [Three Chapters in the History of Christian Kabbalah (Heb.)] (Jerusalem, 1975), p. 24. [. . . For a full discussion of this passage see the Hebrew text here.]

56a. These statements of the Church Fathers are collected in an article in the journal *La France Franciscaine*, 12 (1929), pp. 529–537. I wish to thank Fr. Pierre Lenhardt for calling my attention to this article.

Neckam's period, but I have yet to trace its source and its precise contextual meaning (perhaps he is referring to a two letter closed syllable?).

III. The Exegesis of Genesis 1:1

Within this context, one ought to note that Christian discussions of Genesis 1:1 may have exerted a general influence on the way the Zohar interpreted this verse. In Zohar I:15b we read: "'The Lord, our God the Lord'. These are the three stages corresponding to the divine mystery found in 'In the beginning God created.'" As was demonstrated earlier in this paper, the triune of "the Lord, our God, the Lord" (*Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai* found in the *Shema*) is originally a Christian formulation, which is here given as a parallel to the first three words of the Torah.⁵⁷

Furthermore, it seems that the very reading of Genesis 1:1 in the aforementioned passage of the Zohar, in which the word 'God' is considered the object of the verb 'created' rather than its subject, is of Christian inception. In Christian-Jewish polemic literature Jewish writers are extremely critical of such a reading, viewing it as wholly a Christian distortion. R. Yom-Tov Lipmann of Muelhausen (14th–15th centuries) in his *Sefer HaNitzahon (Parashat Bereshith, par. 4)* wrote:

"In the beginning God created." Here the heretics have erred in saying that *bereshith* is the Holy One, who is called the First One, and that he created Elohim (God) — which they interpret to mean as Jesus. This is a malicious fabrication. And even if they erred, have they not the eyes to see the continuation of the verse — "the heavens and the earth"? If another creation which had occurred prior to the world's were cited in this verse, as they claim, would not the text have added a conjunctive *vav*, reading the text as follows — "*and* the heaven and the earth." In addition, the meaning of *bereshith* is "in the beginning/at first" and not, as they mistakenly interpret it, "the First One."

It is interesting to note that R. Yom-Tov, who was a Kabbalist, did not realize that a similar interpretation existed in the Zohar (I:15a, discussed above), although it is possible that for the sake of his polemic, he pretends ignorance of any Jewish version of this interpretation.

This Christian interpretation of Genesis 1:1 (in which "God" is considered the object of the sentence) seems to be very old, for the rabbis of the Talmud (in Megilla 9a) already attack it: "It is told that Ptolemy the King assembled seventy-two elders . . . and he said to them . . . 'Write down for me (in Greek) the Torah of Moses your teacher.' God caused them all to be of one mind so that each of them

57. *Adonai Eloheinu Adonai* in this sentence is also parallel to "I shall be as I shall be" (Ex. 3:14), interpreted several lines earlier.

translated the first verse: ‘God created in the beginning (*bereshith*).’ On this passage Rashi comments: “So that no one could say that *bereshith* was a noun and that there are two sovereign realms, one having created the other.” Rashi’s understanding of this rabbinic passage seems to be substantiated by the reading of the verse in the extant text of the Septuagint: there the word order is the same as in the original Hebrew — “In the beginning God created (‘Εν ἀρχῇ, ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεός) and not “God created in the beginning.” Following Rashi’s suggestion, there is then no reason to assume that the rabbis in this passage are referring to a Greek translation — where the word order was changed — different from the one found in the Septuagint; but we can rather conclude that they are referring to the same Greek rendering, in which the word God appears in the nominative form, as the subject and not the object of the sentence (ὁ Θεός and not τὸν Θεόν), but since Hebrew is a language without case endings, the Rabbis described the sense of this translation in terms of word order. Be that as it may, the Zohar nevertheless interpreted the word God in Genesis 1:1 as the object of the verb “created,” following a Christian tradition attacked by Jewish polemicists throughout the ages. One should note though that the Zohar is not unique among the Kabbalistic writings of its generation to use this interpretation of Genesis 1:1; there were those among Jewish circles who preceded the Zohar.⁵⁸

IV. The Letter *Zaddi* — Allusion to Jesus?

We shall now turn to another parallel text in the Zohar which will, in my opinion, also contribute to our understanding of the subject of the “son” who is concealed until the coming of the Messiah, according to the passage by Heredia and the above-mentioned parallels. The passage below is taken from a lengthy passage on the creation of the world, during which each letter of the alphabet approaches the Creator and asks that He use it to create the world and to begin the Torah. (This motif in general and many of its particulars are taken from the Midrash Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva — *op. cit.*, no.2.) This is what the Zohar writes about the letter *Zaddi*:

Enters the *Zaddi* and says: “O Lord of the Universe, may it please Thee to create with me the world, inasmuch as I am the sign of the righteous (*zaddikim*) and of Thyself who art called righteous (*zaddik*), as it is written, ‘For the Lord is righteous, He loves righteous deeds’ (Ps. 11:7), and hence it is meet to create the world with me.”

58. Such an interpretation is found among all the disciples of R. Isaac the Blind and in Nahmanides. See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York, 1961), p. 55, n. 402. See, e.g., *Ma'arekhet ha-Elohut* (Mantua, 1558), Ch. 7, pp. 82b–83a, and in Isaac Ibn Latif, *Sha'ar ha-Shamayim*. See Sara O. Heller-Wilensky, “Isaac Ibn Latif — Philosopher or Kabbalist?,” in A. Altmann, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), n. 215. Cf. above, n. 56.

The Lord made answer: "O *Zaddi*, thou art *Zaddi* and thou signifiest righteousness, but thou must be concealed, thou mayest not come out in the open so much lest thou givest the world cause for offense. For thou consistest of the letter *Nun* surmounted by the letter *Yod* which is the holy covenant."⁵⁹ And this is the mystery of how God created the first man: with two faces.⁶⁰ In the same way the *Nun* and the *Yod* in the *Zaddi* are turned back-to-back like this (𐤎) and not face to face like this (𐤎). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to her further: "I will in time divide you in two⁶¹ so as to appear face to face⁶² but thou wilt go up in another place."

I have dealt with this passage at length elsewhere⁶³ where I proved that it contains the idea of the concealed *zaddik* who, although he is the foundation of the entire world, must conceal himself and the secrets of his doctrine, In this he is similar to the *sefirah* of *yesod*, called *Zaddik*, symbolized by the masculine organ which is concealed despite being the source of corporeal splendor.⁶⁴ There, I posited that the passage was referring to Simeon bar Yohai, the literary hero of the Zohar. I showed that this passage (the part about the letters *Nun* and *Yod*) also indicates a certain flaw in the mystical-sexual existence of Simeon bar Yohai, which will be repaired through coupling between him and the Shekhinah. While I do not renounce this interpretation, I wish to add another level of understanding to it. In my opinion, this description was also influenced in a decisive manner by the image of Jesus, as it was understood by the Zohar. The literary persona of Simeon bar Yohai in the Zohar is syncretistic, combining the figure of Jesus, as well as others, with the qualities of the historic Simeon bar Yohai.⁶⁵ The fact that Simeon bar Yohai is described in the Zohar as the son of God also supports this hypothesis.⁶⁶

59. The letter *Nun* is the Shekhinah, the feminine, while the letter *Yod* represents the masculine *sefirah* of *Yesod* (which is the "holy covenant", i.e., the covenant of circumcision). From the coupling of these two (as well as from their graphic combination) the letter *Zaddi* is produced. However, this coupling and union is not complete, as I shall explain.

60. According to Berakhot 61a. The Sages' words in the Talmud are borrowed from Plato's *Symposium* and here (in the Zohar) they are interpreted symbolically.

61. According to Moses Cordovero's *Or Yakar* (I, Jerusalem 1962): לנטרא (to guard) rather than לנטרא (to saw).

62. Another version brought by Cordovero (*op. cit.*) is: גפיך גפיך = organs organs, rather than אפיך באפיך = face to face.

63. In my article, "The Messiah." (*op. cit.*, n.14); pp. 139–142. In Sabbateanism, discussions of the *Zaddi* in the Zohar are explained as referring to Shabbetai Zevi. Cf. my article, "A Messianic Treatise by R. Wolf the son of R. Jónathan Eibeshutz," *Kiryat Sefer* 57 (1982), p. 156, n. 49-50.

64. Cf. Zohar II: 186b.

65. In my article ("The Messiah," *op. cit.*), I pointed out several other figures who were also incorporated into the Zohar's literary image of Simeon bar Yohai. These figures include Jews and non-Jews alike such as: R. Eliezer ha-Gadol, R. Akiba, Socrates, Simon Magus and Simeon Stylites. Now Jesus must be added to the list. I explained at length there why the author of the Zohar chose Simeon bar Yoḥai to be the hero of his story and I showed that the persona of the historical Simeon bar Yoḥai predominated in the creation of the literary image of Simeon bar Yoḥai in the Zohar.

66. In the Zohar we have found Simeon bar Yoḥai described as the son of God in the technical

I base my argument that this passage refers to Jesus on several points. First, there is striking ideational parallelism between this passage and others which I interpreted above, whose subject I tried to show was Jesus. Thus, God's statement that *Zaddi* will have to be concealed until its repair is clearly parallel to *bera* (son), which is to remain sterile until its repair by *eber* (organ);⁶⁷ the subject of *bera* and *eber* is parallel, in turn, to the impotent "son" in *Sifra de-Tseniutha* and the statement of Simeon bar Yohai, according to the passage by Heredia, that the subject of the son will be revealed only with the coming of the Messiah. It seems to me, as well, that the very rationalization of the need for concealment — "so as not to give the world cause for offense" — hints at the idea's association with Christianity; in the social reality of the Middle Ages, there was clearly good reason for concealment and esotericism regarding such an idea. Additional study of the text (concerning the letter *Zaddi*) raises further parallels between it and the above text dealing with *bera* and *eber*. God refused to create the world with the letter *Zaddi*, claiming that it was flawed and needed to remain concealed until its repair. Thus is *bera* flawed (impotent and unable to procreate) until later, when it will be reformed and will become *eber* (an organ). Even the means of repair is similar: in one instance the switching of the letters *Yod* and *Nun* which comprise the letter *Zaddi* and in the other instance the switching of the order of the letters in the word *bara* (created). The type of flaw is also similar: *bara's* defect is one of impotence and *Zaddi's* flaw is the absence of sexual harmony, as reflected in the male and female being turned back-to-back and thus not in a proper position for mating, a problem similar to that of impotence. In essence, both passages deal with a first opportunity to create the world (potentially or actually) which is unsuccessful. In my discussion above about *bara* and *eber*. I pointed out that this is, in fact, another version of the myth concerning the "Death of the Kings of Edom." The text here concerning *Zaddi* parallels the subject of the Kings of Edom even more closely. The flaw in these kings' existence responsible for their

and precise sense of the concept, and not only as an appellation of a mystical character, beloved and intimate in his relation with God, as was the case with several figures such as Ḥanina ben Dosa and Ḥoni ha-Me'aggel. See Zohar III, 61b [...]

On the subjects of the divine status of Simeon bar Yohai in the Zohar, see also II: 35a "The face of the Lord' (Ex. 34:23) — this is Rabbi Simeon bar Yohai." Furthermore, the description at the end of *Idra Zuta* (Zohar III: 296b) of the coupling of the divine "Yesod" with the Shekhinah gives the clear impression that Simeon bar Yohai is identified mythically with the *sefirah* of *Yesod*; i.e., he is the mate, as though he is the incarnation of this *sefirah* (I discussed this issue at length in my article, "The Messiah," *op. cit.* n. 14).

67. In the passage discussed above, whose source is in Zohar I: 3b, i.e., just one page after our passage. For another parallel, see II: 35a.

death was celibacy, remedied only by the last of them, who married.⁶⁸ Elsewhere, this defect is described in the following words (*Zohar* II: 176b, at the beginning of *Sifra de-Tseniutha*): “Until there was a balance⁶⁹ they were not looking *face to face* and the ancient kings died.” The phrase “face to face” is the very expression used regarding the repair of the letter *Zaddi* in our text. Above, I speculated that perhaps the subject of *bera* and the “Kings of Edom” was connected to Christian hegemony (“Edom” is a well-known appellation for Christianity) and that impotence or celibacy is connected to the monastic ideal in Christianity.⁷⁰ I now further suggest that this letter *Zaddi* perhaps refers to Jesus and to his successors, i.e., the celibate popes.

There is another argument strengthening the connection between the letter *Zaddi* and Jesus. In my opinion, the above text concerning *Zaddi* is actually a reworking of a text from the midrash Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva which deals with the same letter; there the letter *Zaddi* is explicitly connected with Jesus! While the text in its extant form is clearly anti-Christian, I maintain (and shall attempt to prove) that the text in its original, uncensored version bore a completely different character. Apparently the author of the *Zohar* had this first version, which he reworked into the above text. This assumption about such a first version is consistent with my view of Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva generally — i.e., that it originated in Jewish circles which shared many Christian views.⁷¹ This midrash’s influence on our text from the *Zohar* is not surprising for, as stated, the text is taken from a work which is itself a reworking of a particular section of this midrash.⁷²

68. See, for example, *Zohar* III: 135b (which is part of *Idra Rabbah*).

69. On the subject of the *Matkela* see my work (*op. cit.*, n. 5), pp. 329-330. There, I discussed the elements of the idea and its development, and even its origins (primarily in the writings of Isaac Sagi Nahor).

70. Cf. above n. 46.

71. The evidence is as follows: (a) The various versions of the Trinity — see above, n. 2; (b) The subject of the letter *Tav* — see above, n. 55; (c) The subject of Jesus which I explain here; (d) The emphasis on the idea of the new Torah to be revealed by the Messiah. See *ibid.*, p. 346 [...] and pp. 367-368 [...]. Incidentally, this idea is developed again in the *Zohar* (eg., II: 130b — which belongs to *Idra Rabbah*, and III: 164b), and see above, n. 49. My colleague, M. Idel, agrees with me on this issue (some of the above became clear for me through conversations with him), and he suggests the following additional proofs: (e) Poverty is idealized in Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva (eg., p. 361) and thus this midrash is perhaps close in spirit to the Jewish-Christian sect of the Ebionites; [...] (f) Numerous passages in Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva are similar to Shi’ur Komah (eg., p. 370). Such speculations (according to M. Idel) derived from circles with an affinity to Christianity.

72. This passage is found there (according to the Wertheimer edition [cf. above, n. 2], pp. 396-406), but concludes before the text with which I am presently dealing, concerning the letter *Zaddi*. It seems that the author of the *Zohar* combined different sections from this midrash in this passage (and perhaps he also had a different version of the midrash).

The following is the text from Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva which, in my opinion, influenced this section in the *Zohar*:⁷³

Why does *Zaddi* have two heads? Because it is Jesus of Nazareth who caught two heads — one of Israel and one of Edom — and stood and led people astray. And because Israel saw this, they arose and crucified him on the cross. On what did they base themselves: “If your brother, your own mother’s son entices you in secret” (Dt. 13:7) — [your mother’s son, but] not the son of your father.⁷⁴

There are numerous variant readings in the manuscripts of this text, and it is not easy to determine the original version which may have influenced the author of the *Zohar*, for it is precisely texts such as these that are most liable to distortion by censorship — both internal and external.⁷⁵ It seems to me that the text was originally more sympathetic to Jesus than it is in its present form. First, the very linkage of Jesus with the letter *Zaddi*, which evokes first and foremost the association of *zaddik* (righteous person), supports this contention.⁷⁶ Furthermore, after the above anti-Christian homily, one of the manuscripts⁷⁷ cites (with some textual differences),⁷⁸ another homily which interprets the *Zaddi* as the messianic. We can assume that in the original version these two homilies were one. The text is as follows (subsequent to the anti-Christian text):

Another interpretation: Why does *Zaddi* have two forms (i.e., one when it appears in the middle of the word and one when it is the final letter of a word)? This is the true branch [*zemah zedakah*] (as in Jeremiah 33:15 “In those days and at that time, I will raise up a true branch of David’s line...”) And why does it have two heads? This is the Messiah son of David, as it is written: “A shoot shall grow out of the stump of Jesse” (Isaiah 11:1).⁷⁹ Why

73. The passage is there, pp. 408-409.

74. Regarding the homily in the last sentence (“the son of your mother and not of your father”): this recurs often in the polemic literature of the Middle Ages. Cf. *Nizahon Yashan* (*op. cit.*, n. 15), p. 65 [...]. And see Y. Rosenthal’s article in *Mehkarim u-Mekarot*, I, Jerusalem 1967, p. 205 which brings several parallels (although he was not aware of the source in the Midrash Othiot de-Rabbi Akiva). Rosenthal is of the opinion that the rabbis already knew of this homily and therefore they noted that Jesus was judged as an enticer (BT Sanhedrin 43a, according to the uncensored version). [...]

75. In several manuscripts the entire passage has been deleted. In MS Bodleian 2872 (number 22762 in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts [below — IMHM]), p. 12, instead of the text there appears only, “missing in transcription.” The same is true in MS Berlin Tubingen (IMHM 7364).

76. In one contrived explanation (according to one of the versions) the letter *Zaddi* is interpreted negatively. This is the case with MS Munich No.22, (IMHM 1169), p. 75: “This is an allusion to hunting, for they hunted him down because of the two heads.” [...] The term *zaddik* (righteous) for Jesus is common in Christian writings, and is found already in the New Testament (see Matthew 27:19, 24 and parallels).

77. MS Jewish Theological Seminary (New York) mic 1833 (IMHM 10931).

78. [Full text quoted in the Hebrew version of this article, n. 78].

79. The verse continues: “And a twig shall sprout from his stock.” It seems to me that the “shoot” and the “twig” are the two heads of the letter *Zaddi*.

is he called Messiah? Because he is the head of all.⁸⁰ And why is the bottom part (of the *Zaddi*) bent? Because it is burdened and sick from Israel's sins (an explanation suitable also for Christians!). And why is the other *Zaddi* (the one that concludes a word) straight? Because God testifies to Israel through his prophets that he is a true branch, as it is written: "See a time is coming — declares the Lord — when I will raise up... [The verse continues: "... a true branch of David's line.]" (Jer. 23:5) And why does *Zaddi* have two heads? One is for "branch" (*zumah*) and one is for "true" (*zaddik*).

Probably in the original version of Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva, the two heads of the letter *Zaddi* did not expound the negative two-faced quality of Jesus (as it appears in the printed version), who made himself the head both of Edom (the gentiles) and also of Israel. Perhaps it originally alluded to the two facets of Jesus's personality: one human and one divine (speculation about these facets and their inter-relations caused many controversies in the Christian church). In fact, I found an allusion to this problem in another manuscript,⁸¹ which says the following about the letter *Zaddi*: "And it is Jesus of Nazareth who embraced two heads — one was the head of Israel and the other an image without any substance." "An image without any substance" is a clearly derogatory expression referring to the Christian belief in Jesus's divine nature.

As already stated, I believe this text was reworked by the author of the Zohar: the result is the above passage about the letter *Zaddi*. The author of the Zohar added some kabbalistic⁸² and other aspects to the figure of Jesus; he even incorporated, as already stated, the idea of the "concealed *zaddik*." The two heads of the letter *Zaddi*, which are interpreted at length in Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva, become, in the Zohar, the letters *Yod* and *Nun* which comprise the letter *Zaddi*. Who knows — perhaps this was the case also in one of the versions of Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva, and perhaps *Yod* and *Nun* even stand for *Yeshu ha-Nozri* (Jesus of Nazareth)!

Perhaps the *Yod* in the Zohar here symbolize not only the masculine and feminine principles whose union is defective — both in the realm of the earthly *zaddik* and in the cosmic, divine sphere⁸³ — but also the duality of the divine and

80. I did not understand this explanation.

81. MS Vatican 228 (IMHM 258).

82. Similarly, I have found several manuscripts of Othioth de-Rabbi Akiva in which the transcribers infused the passage with a kabbalistic meaning. In several manuscripts, this occurs just after the scribal symbol for missing text (eg., MS Bodleian — *op. cit.*, n. 75); in MS Munich (*op. cit.*, n. 76) next to the passage about Jesus there is the homily from *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Margaliyot, 102) about the pillar called *zaddik* who is the foundation of the world.

83. Cf. the kabbalistic commentary on the alphabet found in MS Columbia University 893 K 13 (IMHM 20669). There (p. 144), the name of the letter *Zaddi* is derived from *zad* (side); "They were created 'side-by side'" (i.e., male and female). According to the midrash, they are Adam and Eve, who are the *sefirot* of *Tiferet* and *Malkut*. The author of this manuscript was certainly influenced by the *Zohar* passage under discussion; M. Idel is of the opinion that the author is Rabbi David ben Yehuda ha-Ḥasid. See Idel's article in *Alei Sefer 10* (1982), p. 30.

human principle (or the analogous duality of the body and the soul) which the author perceived in his persona of the *Zaddik*:⁸⁴ and it is this dualism which will be harmonized in the days of the Messiah. It is interesting that the Zohar illustrates this dualism through Adam, who was created with two faces; perhaps this comparison supports the hypothesis that the letter *Zaddi* is a reference to Jesus who, according to the Christians, came to the world only in order to rectify the sin of Adam.

If the letter *Zaddi* does indeed refer to Jesus (and it seems to me that the evidence presented has been quite convincing) then this text clearly expresses the Zohar's ambivalence toward Jesus. On the one hand, the letter *Zaddi* is defective, symbolizing the Exile and the dominion of the gentiles; on the other hand, God says to it, 'O *Zaddi*, thou art *Zaddi* and thou signifiest righteousness!'"

(Incidentally, I have found a profound eschatological exposition on the letter *Zaddi* being comprised of *Yod* and *Nun*, in Rabbi Yom Tob Muelhausen's Commentary on the Alphabet.⁸⁵ There, the *Yod* connected to the neck of the *Nun* refers to the reign of Jesus during the Exile, while the simple *Zaddi* symbolizes the coming of the Messiah). [...]

To conclude, the Zohar provides a brilliant illustration of the process of borrowing and influence between the two sister faiths. However, there was no love lost between Judaism and Christianity. Just as the Jewish component in Christianity did not increase the Christian's love for the Jews, so is it impossible to deduce from the Christian influences on the Zohar any affection on the part of the Zohar's author towards Christians. In fact, the Zohar is extreme in its antipathy towards the nations of the world.⁸⁶ Indeed, it seems to me that the spiritual

84. See above, p. 61. This is similar to what we found in the manuscript of Othioth de Rabbi Akiva — *op. cit.*, n. 81ff.

85. In the commentary "Alfa Beta" in *Kovez Sifrei Stam*, I (Jerusalem, 1976), p. 270.

86. Quite frequently the Zohar transforms classical Rabbinic passages into extremely anti-Christian statements. Thus, in Rabbinic teaching the guardian angels of the nations of the world and their lands are actually officers of God; and while they are lower than Him in status, they are not negative per se (see E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem, 1979), p. 138ff). In the Zohar, however, they have generally been turned into emissaries of the *Sitra Aħra*: they themselves are called, at times, *sitrin aħaranin* (eg., Zohar, II: 33a. The use of the plural there is one of the pieces of evidence that the term "Sitra Aħra", which has its origin in the Zohar, at times served there as a technical term and a general appellation for evil forces.) The gods of the gentiles (identified with their angels) are none other than Satan, who is called *El Aħer* ("a different God" — for his connection with Jesus see above, nn. 45–46). The soul of the gentiles has its origin in this God (just as the soul of Israel is part of a transcendent God), and that is why the gentile soul is impure (Zohar I:47a) and why the gentiles are a cause of impurity so long as their souls are in their bodies (Zohar I: 139a).

The change that the Zohar makes in the spirit of Rabbinic teaching is especially striking in the dis-

affinity between the two religions was among the causes for the animosity between them.

Immanuel 17 (Winter 1983/84)

cussion of the seventy bullocks sacrificed on Sukkot. According to the Sages (Sukkah 55b), it appears that these bulls were offered on behalf of the seventy nations of the world, as the gentile nations were also judged during Sukkot as to whether they would receive rain (see Zech 14:17). While we do find this idea in the Zohar (III: 54b-55a), it is generally understood negatively. First, the bullocks are sacrificed to the gentile ministers so that the latter would deal with the nations and leave Israel alone, not disturbing God's celebration with his children Israel on *Shemini Azeret*, the holiday exclusively for Israel (*Zohar* I: 64a) [...] Moreover, the fact that the number of bullocks offered during the festival decreases each day is seen in the Zohar (III: 24b; cf. III: 259a) as a symbol of the progressive weakening and destruction of the nations. [...]

Finally, one cannot discuss Christian influences on the Zohar without mentioning Y. Baer's study, "The Historical Background of the 'Raya Mehemna'" (Heb.), *Zion* 5 (1939-40), pp. 1-44, in which he discusses the decisive influence of Franciscan thought upon the latter sections of the Zohar, the *Raya Mehemna* and the *Tikkunei Zohar*.