

# God, Humanity, and the Universe

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The Andromeda Galaxy, one of our nearer neighbors in space.  
Image: NASA.

## Summary

This article reveals a serious mismatch between the understanding of Deity, formulated in biblical times but still current in the major world religions, and today's scientific knowledge of the physical universe. Modern esoteric teachings on the hierarchy of Logoi are more compatible with scientific cosmology and better depict the Creator and Life-Giver of a vast, complex universe. Yet religious doctrine has deep roots and self-sustaining support systems. Efforts to encourage acceptance of esoteric theology across a broad spectrum of religious traditions must be approached with sensitivity, patience and humility.

The article also examines religious notions of a personal God—including the Beloved of the mystics—in relation to esoteric teachings on the Logoi and the human Monad. There may

be a gap in esoteric teachings, and further insights may be needed to explain an important element of the mystical experience, extending over millennia and spanning multiple religious traditions. To this end, esotericists could benefit from studying the great mystics and even participating in appropriate contemplative disciplines.

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## About the Author

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## Introduction

What do we mean by “God”? Who or what is God? To what extent is God knowable? What are God’s attributes? Is God interested in the world, humanity, or us as individuals? What kind of relationship, if any, can we expect to have with God? These are questions people have asked ever since humanity acquired the rudiments of consciousness. Many answers have been offered, but no consensus has developed. Nor could a single article, like this one, be expected to provide universally satisfying answers. Nevertheless, to explore such questions may stimulate group insight and move us closer to an understanding acceptable among multiple constituencies.

In mainstream western religions, God is believed to be the creator of the universe. God is also believed to be loving, compassionate, and accessible by individual people. Christians believe that he sent his only son to redeem humanity. These concepts of God were formulated two millennia ago when our knowledge of physical reality was very different from what it is today. The universe was believed to be small and geocentric. Today we know that the universe is almost unbelievably large and complex. Yet the God who created and rules over it is still perceived as anthropomorphic and focused intimately on our tiny planet and its occupants: God knows our innermost thoughts;<sup>1</sup> and prayers will be heard—and hopefully answered.

The result is a mismatch between religion and science that hampers religious thought, especially among educated people. The mismatch also leads to unnecessary attacks on religion by atheist skeptics and on science by religious fundamentalists. Hinduism and the Judaic Kabbalah conceive of a Godhead less constrained by geocentrism and anthropomorphism; but they still do not adequately accommodate today’s scientific knowledge of the universe.

Clearly new insights are needed to guide theological and philosophical thought. They could not come from scientific discovery alone. Insights of a different order are needed, reflect-

ing understanding and perspectives greater than our own.

Institutional religion attaches great importance to divine revelation. But revelation typically is assumed to have occurred in the distant past, and to have stopped with closure of the scriptural canon. Supposedly, the initial deposit of truth would suffice for all time. Authoritative bodies—including, in Christianity’s case, the ecumenical councils of the early church—expounded upon scripture and formulated increasingly detailed doctrinal statements. But no provision was made, or permitted, to allow the deposit of fundamental knowledge to expand with discovery, scholarship, and the evolution of ideas.

In principle, the Eastern Orthodox churches acknowledge the validity of mystical theology as a further source of revelation. But in practice, mystics’ insights have often been challenged by traditionalists. The Church of Rome invariably denounced individuals, like Meister Eckhart and Giordano Bruno, who shared their own mystical insights. The Anglican and Lutheran churches are less rigid, but they have never accepted any change in key doctrines relating to God, the trinity, or Christ.

Liberal theology has broken free from traditional dogma, primarily at the expense of losing sight of the Divine and the sacred. German Lutheran theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), a leading biblical scholar of his time, conceded that scripture contained revelation in the “message of God’s decisive act in Christ.”<sup>2</sup> But he sought to strip away layers of “mythology” in the New Testament, and he claimed that biblical accounts of miracles “mistakenly objectified the transcendent into the immanent.”<sup>3</sup> Other liberal theologians have adopted a skeptical attitude toward revelation of any kind. The divinity of Christ is questioned or ignored, and God is turned into an abstract concept like Paul Tillich’s “Ground of Being.”<sup>4</sup>

Esoteric philosophy speaks of the Ageless Wisdom, gifted to infant humanity by the Planetary Hierarchy and supplemented by new revelation, as and when the human race could benefit from it. Esotericists believe that revela-

tion continues through the intentional seeding of human consciousness via mystical insights or the various methods of communication characteristic of modern esoteric teachings.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, they believe that new revelation has been made available concerning Deity. The concept of a hierarchy of Logoi is more compatible with today's scientific knowledge than is the creator-God of traditional religion, and it can be expanded as new astronomical data become available.

Religion is not just about a creator-God, ruling over the universe. People of all western religions—and many elsewhere—speak of a personal God: one with whom they can form relationships; one they can talk to, perhaps listen to; one to whom they can turn to in times of hardship; one to whom they can express devotion, praise and thanksgiving. In addition to explaining who or what the God of the universe is, we are challenged to explain who or what is this personal God.

Theologians declare that God is both transcendent and immanent. And the immanent God is not just an aspect of the environment, like the air we breathe, but is present to us in a personal way. How divine transcendence and immanence are related and coexist are deemed to be mysteries beyond our comprehension. Part of the problem of explaining God's immanence, at least for western Christianity, lies in its insistence that creation does not share in the divine essence. The universe and humanity are separate from God. We are body and soul, but not spirit.

Esoteric teachings echo traditional beliefs in the religions of South Asia in insisting that, at the most fundamental level of our being, we are fragments of the divine essence. To use western terminology, we have, or *are*, divine Monads, individualized but sharing in one Divinity. The Monad is the guarantor of our divine destiny; we came from Spirit, and we shall eventually return to Spirit.

The experience of a personal God is shared, not only by the masses of devout people, but also by great saints and mystics. The saints and mystics of all religions report experiences of close, even intimate, contact with the Divine.

Many mystics speak in anthropomorphic terms of “the Beloved,” and their experiences seem to grow ever more intense as they progress on their spiritual paths.

Several theories can be proposed to reconcile the experience of the Beloved with esoteric teachings, including the suggestion that the mystics have attained the third initiation and are glimpsing the Monad. However, none seems satisfactory. Rather, it would appear that new esoteric knowledge is needed to explain the phenomenon.

In order to limit the scope of the article, the primary focus is on “western” religion—that is, on Christianity (including Eastern Orthodox Christianity), Judaism, and Islam. Occasional references to the religions of Asia are made when they shed light on issues pertaining to western religion.

## The Manifest Universe

The scriptures of western religions were written in the Middle East, where a consensus understanding of the universe existed for centuries or even millennia. The universe was thought to consist of three tiers. Human beings and all other creatures lived on a flat Earth. Below it was the underworld: “the water under the earth.”<sup>6</sup> Above it was the dome of the firmament, a relatively short distance up in the sky. The Sun, Moon and planets moved in the firmament, while the stars were attached to it or shone through apertures, like holes in a black curtain. God, who created the universe and maintained a close interest in humanity, resided above the firmament.

That small universe, perhaps a thousand miles across and no more than a hundred miles from top to bottom, provided the backdrop against which notions of God, still prevalent in mainstream western religion, were formulated. Before we evaluate these traditional concepts of God, and more satisfactory concepts offered by esoteric teachings, it will be useful to review what is known of the universe from modern astronomical observations: a universe which contrasts in almost every conceivable way with the one just described.

Earth is 12,742 km, or roughly 7,900 miles, in diameter. It has a single satellite, the Moon: 3,475 km in diameter, or roughly one-fourth the size of Earth. The Moon moves in an eccentric orbit that brings it as close as 362,600 km and as far as 405,400 km from Earth.<sup>7</sup> Earth is one of eight planets—nine if Pluto is counted, ten if Ceres is included—and innumerable smaller objects and radiation belts that make up the Solar System. They all orbit the Sun, a main-sequence star. The innermost planet Mercury makes a complete revolution around the Sun every eighty-eight days; Neptune takes 165 years, and Pluto 248 years.

The Sun's mean diameter is 1,392,680 km, or about 100 times greater than Earth's. We are some 150,000,000 km from the Sun. The Sun's light takes about eight minutes to reach Earth; or we say that the distance from Earth to the Sun is eight light-minutes—roughly 1/66,000 of a light-year. The edge of the Solar System is ill-defined, but a common estimate places it at about 0.7 light-days, or 1/500 light-years, from the Sun.<sup>8</sup>

Our Sun is one of 100 billion to 400 billion stars that make up the spiral galaxy known as the Milky Way. At the time of writing, approximately 1,000 exoplanets—planets orbiting other stars—have been discovered, and as many as 4,000 have been identified pending confirmation. New exoplanets are continually being discovered, some orbiting stars resembling our Sun and with characteristics resembling Earth's. Those discovered so far all lie in our immediate neighborhood of the galaxy. Extrapolation suggests that the Milky Way may contain more than 10 billion planets comparable with Earth.

The Milky Way is 100,000–120,000 light-years in diameter. The Solar System lies on one of its spiral arms, some 27,000 light-years from the galactic center. That latter distance is roughly 1.8 billion times the distance from Earth to the Sun. The Solar System rotates about the galactic center—thought to contain a massive black hole—making a complete revolution in about 240 million years.<sup>9</sup> It has made roughly one-quarter of a revolution since the extinction of the dinosaurs.

Until the 1920s, the universe was identified with the Milky Way. Then, with improvements in observational technology, celestial objects previously thought to lie within the Milky Way began to be identified as separate galaxies. In due course, many more galaxies were discovered.

As many as eighteen small galaxies may be satellites of the Milky Way. Our nearest major galaxy is Andromeda, roughly 2.5 million light-years away. An image of Andromeda is shown at the beginning of this article. The Milky Way and Andromeda are among the fifty-or-so galaxies that make up the so-called Local Group. In turn, the Local Group is part of the Virgo Cluster whose center lies in the direction of the constellation Virgo. In turn again, the Virgo Cluster is part of the Virgo Supercluster. The Virgo Supercluster is estimated to be some 110 million light-years across and to contain at least 100 galaxy groups and clusters.

Until recently, the Virgo Supercluster was believed to be the largest assemblage of galaxies to which we belong. But in 2014, a group of astronomers, led by R. Brent Tully of the University of Hawaii and Helene Courtois of the University of Lyon, showed that the Virgo Supercluster is just part of a larger supercluster, now known as Laniakea, a Hawaiian word that means “immeasurable heaven.” Laniakea encompasses about 100,000 galaxies and extends over 520 million light-years.<sup>10</sup> Even that vast distance is less than two percent of the diameter of the observable universe.<sup>11</sup> Astronomers believe that there may be at least 100 billion *galaxies* in the universe. For comparison, about 5,000 *stars* are visible to the naked eye on a clear night.

The observable universe is nearly twenty orders of magnitude—factors of ten—larger than the Earth. To put that number in perspective: Earth is larger than the hydrogen atom by “only” seventeen orders of magnitude.<sup>12</sup> The entire physical universe may be larger still; the observable part is all that we can ever hope to see, because more distant parts may be receding from us faster than the speed of light.<sup>13</sup> Scientific cosmology has not ruled out the pos-

sibility that other universes may exist alongside our own; indeed, the notion of a *multiverse* seems to be gaining momentum in academic circles.

Clearly, this is a very different universe from the one that underlies religious notions of God. And the impact of that difference on theology can scarcely be ignored. A Deity who informs and ensouls physical reality in its entirety must be almost infinitely remote from us in power and consciousness. The challenge for theology is, or should be, to explain how such a God could possibly bridge the gulf in consciousness to interact in any manner, or share any knowledge of itself, with us. Theology should also be challenged to suggest why such a God would choose to pay us—specks of being on an infinitesimal speck of matter within a vast universe, or many universes—any attention whatsoever.

## God in Religion

Most religions in antiquity were polytheistic. Some gods were assumed to animate conspicuous features or forces of nature, while others presided over families, tribes, or territorial areas. Occasionally an Amen (Amon or Amun), a Marduk, an Indra, a Zeus, or an Athena assumed superior importance, but there was no sense that any of them reigned alone, even in the pantheon of the particular culture; rather they expressed particular divine attributes, while fellow gods expressed others.

Monotheism had few precedents in the ancient world. Aten reigned supreme for a mere two decades, in the second millennium BCE, before Egypt returned to its traditional polytheism. Biblical Judaism was unique in its time for making monotheism a central tenet of faith: first in the sense that only one God merited worship,<sup>14</sup> and eventually in the sense that there really was only one God. In due course, belief in a single God passed into the other two Abrahamic religions: Christianity and Islam. Even then, Christianity modified its monotheism by the doctrine of the trinity: “three in one.”

Polytheism was the norm in classical Greece, but Aristotle’s concept of the Unmoved Mover

could be interpreted as affirming monotheism. The concept was developed further by the Christian theologian Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century CE.

## God of Revelation

The strong belief of western religion is that God *wants* to be known, to reveal himself to his creation. Yet widespread disagreement exists within and among religions on what form revelation takes, and when and to whom it has been communicated. While scripture is widely believed to be the revealed word of God, there is disagreement over what should be recognized as scripture—and further disagreement on how it should be interpreted and translated into other languages.

A common companion belief, as already noted, is that revelation ceased when the writing and compilation of scripture—Jewish, Christian or Islamic—was completed and received official endorsement by the respective religious authorities. Institutional religion is reluctant to acknowledge the possibility of ongoing revelation.

The Hebrew scriptures focus on the Covenant: a contract between God and the people of Israel. YHVH, “I am that I am,” demanded exclusive loyalty from his people.<sup>15</sup> However, his insistence that “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”<sup>16</sup> acknowledged the prevailing polytheism and competition from other tribal gods. His chief competitor was Baal, against whom YHVH’s prophets waged a continual—and sometimes losing—battle. Until the sixth-century BCE, YHVH’s sovereignty was limited to the Promised Land; the Exile finally persuaded the Jews to acknowledge that he was still their God in Babylon. Gradually, YHVH acquired the characteristics of a universal God, ruling over Jews and Gentiles alike, even though the latter might not recognize him.

The earlier books of the Hebrew Bible sometimes referred to God as the *Elohim*; indeed, that name appears in the very first verse of *Genesis*. *Elohim* is an irregular, plural noun, suggesting a plurality of deities; but traditionally, it is taken to refer to the single “God.”

The Elohim come(s) across as more abstract, or at least more impersonal, than does YHVH. On the other hand, scripture records no doubts that the Elohim and the anthropomorphic, tribal deity Yahweh were one and the same.

As YHVH became more universal, he also became more transcendent and remote. Instead of speaking directly to his people, he began to rely on the prophets to speak for him. Most important of the prophets was Moses, to whom God communicated the Ten Commandments. The Mosaic Law: the Decalogue and its elaboration in *Exodus*, *Leviticus*, *Numbers* and *Deuteronomy*, documented what was demanded of the Chosen People in exchange for divine protection under the Covenant.

Judaism gradually softened its monotheism by acknowledging the existence of divine manifestations. They included Ruach ha-Kadesh, literally “the Holy Spirit” but interpreted more commonly as the Divine Breath; Chokmah, or Wisdom, a divine feminine personage; the Kavod, or transcendent glory of God; and finally the Shekinah, the indwelling presence of God.<sup>17</sup> Those manifestations provided added reassurance that the transcendent YHVH was still present for his people. Along with the prophecies, they represented new forms of revelation.

Christ served as an even more tangible manifestation: one who came to redeem the world and to express love in greater measure than had hitherto been known. Christianity has its scriptures: the “Old Testament”—the Hebrew Bible reinterpreted as a set of prophecies pertaining to Christ—and the New Testament. Yet Christian theologians insist that Christ’s incarnation itself was the supreme act of revelation: he was the son of God who took human form. Christ spoke of his father, “the Father,” whom his followers assumed to be the Judaic YHVH. The Fourth Gospel identified Christ as the Logos,<sup>18</sup> a term that came to be understood as “the Word,” but which in Greek philosophy conveyed the sense of a mediator or intermediary.

In due course the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit—the last the direct equivalent of Ruach ha-Kadesh—were molded into a trinity of di-

vine “persons.” The Christian trinity bears some similarity to the Egyptian trinity of Osiris, Isis and Horus, but more closely mirrors the Hindu *trimurti* of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma.

Islam revered Jesus as a prophet, but rejected the notion that he was divine. Moreover, Mohammed, who received and transcribed the *Qur’an*, never claimed divine status for himself. He was simply God’s messenger, “the Prophet.” Islam resembles Buddhism in that respect; the Buddha resisted attempts by his followers to deify him. The *Qur’an* is believed to be the final work of scripture, but Islam teaches that the books of Moses and the Christian gospels contain revealed truth. The *Qur’an* speaks of Jews and Christians as “People of the Book,”<sup>19</sup> and as such they were accorded privileges in Muslim countries during the Middle Ages, and in some countries to the present day.

In addition to the *Qur’an*, most Muslims recognize the *Sunnah*, the verbally transmitted record of Muhammad’s teachings, deeds and sayings—even his silent approvals and disapprovals. The *Sunnah* has been used primarily as a basis for Islamic ethical teachings and jurisprudence.

Whereas Christianity embraced a modified form of monotheism, Islam rejected any notion of a trinity and returned to the strict monotheism of Moses and the Hebrew prophets. Allah is the only God. In common usage *Allah* means “the God”; but it can also mean “the Exalted One,” or “the Being Who comprises all the attributes of perfection.” Furthermore, the name Allah has a mantric quality embodying the idea that there is one sole divinity having the potential for infinite possibility.<sup>20</sup>

In the *Qur’an* we read: “There is no god but He, Merciful to all, Compassionate to each.”<sup>21</sup> The affirmation, repeated five times a day, continues to be: “There is no God but Allah,” or literally “There is no God but the God.” The *Qur’an* emphasizes the power of God: “He is God, There is no God but He, Sovereign . . . Almighty . . . The Creator, Originator, Giver of Forms.”<sup>22</sup>

While the custodians of dogma typically hold that revelation is confined to scripture and possibly divine manifestations, like Christ, many others believe that revelation can be found in mythology, the arts, and nature. This last has been the subject of commentary for thousands of years. The psalmist wrote: “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.”<sup>23</sup> Christian church father John Chrysostom declared: “For not only, indeed, does the magnitude and beauty of the creation, but also the very manner of it, display a God who is the great Founder of the universe. . . . He hath made the mode of this creation to become our best teacher.”<sup>24</sup> The *Qur’an* affirms: “God . . . made the sun and moon to do His bidding, each running for an appointed time. He governs the world. He makes clear His revelations. Perhaps you will be convinced of the encounter with your Lord.”<sup>25</sup>

Although revelation may be all around us, we must still search for it, as we search for the treasures of this world. A Sufi writer expressed it well:

The light hidden in matter is the one light experienced within the mystery of creation, the hidden treasure revealed through the dance of multiplicity. The creation of the manifest world is a revelation of the hidden nature of the divine, as expressed in the *hadith* [records of the sayings of Mohammed], “I was a hidden treasure and I longed to be known, so I created the world.” But we can only experience the wonder and know the true nature of this revelation through the light hidden within it. Just as He has hidden His secret within us—“Man is My secret and I am his secret”—so has He hidden Himself within His creation. Sometimes, in moments amidst the beauty or glory of nature, in the vastness of the stars or the perfection of the early morning dew on a flower, we glimpse this wonder.<sup>26</sup>

### ***God of the Theologians***

*Genesis*, based on earlier texts but compiled at the time of the Exile, affirmed that “God created the heaven and the earth.”<sup>27</sup> Nine centuries

later, in late antiquity, Christianity affirmed: “We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.”<sup>28</sup> Both statements, referring to the transcendent creator-God, were composed when heaven and earth were understood to consist of the dome of the sky and a flat Earth.

Christianity inherited its priestly tradition and the elements of its liturgy from Judaism, but much of its theology, including Christological and trinitarian doctrine, was Greek in origin. Church father Augustine of Hippo acknowledged Christianity’s debt: “Certain partakers with us in the grace of Christ, wonder when they hear and read that Plato had conceptions concerning God, in which they recognize considerable agreement with the truth of our religion.”<sup>29</sup> For over a millennium Platonic ideas held sway in the development of Christian doctrine. In its understanding of God, however, Christian doctrine was slow to incorporate what the Greeks already knew about the structure of the universe.

Both Plato and Aristotle had surmised that the Earth was a sphere, around which the Moon, Sun and planets revolved; beyond all of them was the firmament of fixed stars. This geocentric model was elaborated upon by the Hellenistic astronomer Claudius Ptolemaeus (Ptolemy) in the second-century CE. The Ptolemaic model gradually became the standard understanding of the universe in the West. Even then, theologians made few adjustments. God was assumed to reside beyond the fixed stars, much farther away than in the flat-Earth model; but Earth, at the center of the universe, remained his chief focus.

Changes of a different kind came in the Middle Ages with the revival of Aristotelian philosophy. The revival began among Islamic scholars but then made its way into western Europe, where it quickly merged with Scholasticism. Scholasticism was a method of critical thought in which contrasting ideas could be examined, debated and resolved. Its greatest influence was on western Christianity, though several Jewish scholars became involved, notably Moses Maimonides (1135–1204), who formulated

the *Thirteen Articles of Faith*, one of the few confessional statements in the history of Judaism.<sup>30</sup> Scholasticism had virtually no influence on Eastern Orthodox Christianity until the seventeenth century.

Scholasticism affirmed the principle that religious doctrine might transcend the human mind but could not be incompatible with reason. That principle led to the belief that proofs could be constructed for the existence of God. In the eleventh century, Anselm of Canterbury devised an *ontological* or *a priori* proof asserting that the very definition of God as an infinite being mandates

God's existence.<sup>31</sup> An ontological proof (from the Greek: *ontos* "being" and *logia* "study") stems solely from rational argument. Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274), most renowned of the Scholastics, offered five *a posteriori* proofs that incorporated experience or observation of the world. Further proofs of both types were proposed by later theologians and philosophers.<sup>32</sup>

Aquinas identified several characteristics of God, including simplicity, perfection, goodness, infinity, immutability, and eternity.<sup>33</sup> His and other attempts to describe the divine nature were examples of *kataphatic* (or *cataphatic*) theology, from the Greek *kataphatikos*, which means "positive." Kataphatic theology contrasts with *apophatic* theology (from the Greek *apophatikos*: "negative"), which takes the view that God is so far removed from human understanding that we can only say what it is *not*. For example, the Rabbi Baruch Medzibozer (d. 1811) declared: "God is called the God of Gods in order to demonstrate to us that He is God beyond any conception of Him of which humanity is capable."<sup>34</sup>

Apophatic theology is most appropriate when discussing the transcendent Godhead. The argument is that if the Godhead had attributes it would not be the Godhead. In Hinduism, particularly in Jnana Yoga and Advaita Vedanta, the Brahman, or Godhead, is affirmed to transcend anything that we might say about it; the Sanskrit expression *neti neti* means "not this, not that," or "neither this, nor that." The Kabbalists said much the same about the Ain Soph, which corresponds closely to the Hindu Brahman.

Christian theologians have been singularly silent concerning the transcendent Godhead. One of the few early references is found in the Athanasian Creed, which speaks of "the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."<sup>35</sup> No explanation is provided, but the statement could be interpreted as implying that the three persons of the trinity emerge from a transcendent Godhead. More commonly the Godhead is identified with God the Father, watering down the principle of transcendence and sacrificing the principle that the Godhead should be without attributes.

Notions of the simplicity of God—assertions that God has no component parts—may not have originated with Aquinas; indeed they echo throughout the Abrahamic religions, with two exceptions to be discussed shortly. But he became its champion, and his broad influence assured virtually complete support in Christianity and beyond.

Defending the assertion of divine simplicity, Aquinas argued: "[S]omething has to exist prior to any composite, since composing elements are by their very nature antecedent to a composite. Hence the first of all beings cannot be composite."<sup>36</sup> His mistake was to confuse

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God, the supreme *being*, with the formless Godhead. The Godhead may be simple, but God, conceived of as a being, can be “composite”—though that was a singularly weak term to use in relation to the Deity. The assertion of simplicity has caused many difficulties, including an understanding of the trinity. More seriously, it complicates the issue of reconciling the transcendence and immanence of God. From Aquinas’ time onward the gulf between the two views of God grew ever wider.

One of the exceptions to the insistence on divine simplicity is almost as old as Christianity itself. Several Gnostic writers offered cosmological models involving multiple planes interposed between the *Pleroma*—roughly corresponding to heaven—and the physical world. Each plane had distinct properties and was inhabited by divine, or at least superhuman, beings, who might be either beneficent or malevolent. In some cases pairs of complementary beings, like the beneficent Logos—that is, Christ—and Sophia, occupied a single plane.<sup>37</sup> The most ambitious cosmological model was proposed by the second-century CE Basilides who envisioned 365 planes, one for each day of the cosmic year.<sup>38</sup>

The other exception is found in the Judaic theoretical Kabbalah, which experienced two extraordinary periods of growth: one in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Moorish Spain, and the other in sixteenth-century Palestine.<sup>39</sup> Whereas Moses Maimonides and most other mainstream Jewish scholars insisted on the simplicity of God, the Kabbalists envisioned ten sephiroth (literally “numbers”) interposed between the Godhead, or Ain Soph, and the physical world. The sephiroth can be interpreted variously as challenges to the seeker, archetypal forces, or manifestation of the Divine; several commentators have interpreted them as Logoi, in the sense discussed later in this article. Of the ten sephiroth, six form pairs of opposites, recalling the Logos–Sophia and other polarities of Gnosticism.

Islam never questioned the simplicity of God, but it acknowledges the simultaneous transcendence and immanence of God. It also acknowledges the many divine attributes that

are reflected in the Ninety-Nine Names of God, which include “The Victorious,” “The Loving One,” and “The Light.”<sup>40</sup>

Along with their interest in the divine nature itself, theologians have speculated on how God created the universe. Aside from its importance in understanding the workings of God, the outcome is of great importance to humanity. As noted earlier, western Christianity insisted that God created the universe *ex nihilo*, from nothing. Some scholars have argued that Plato supported such a notion in his dialogue *Timaeus*, but Augustine of Hippo became its strongest advocate in western Christianity.

Ex nihilo creation contrasts with two other theories. One is that the universe is an extension of, or was “birthed by,” the Divine; this is the Neoplatonic concept of *emanation*. The other is that the universe was created from the primeval chaos. This last theory begs the question because one immediately asks: Where did the primeval chaos come from? Was it created ex nihilo? Was it separate from but coexistent with God—in which case God’s place in reality is diminished? Or was it part of the divine essence, in which case we return to a kind of emanation.

Emanation was never shunned as completely in Eastern Orthodox Christianity as it was in the West. And even in the West it was promoted by John Scottus Eriugena and Meister Eckhart, both of whom were condemned for their pains. The former wrote in the ninth century:

It follows that we ought not to understand God and the creature as two things distinct from one another, but as one and the same. For both the creature, by subsisting, is in God; and God, by manifesting himself, in a marvelous and ineffable manner creates himself in the creature.<sup>41</sup>

Hindu teachings strongly support the notion of emanation. For instance, Lord Krishna is quoted as saying, “having pervaded the whole universe with a fragment of Myself, I remain.”<sup>42</sup>

God’s mode of creation has direct implications for humanity. If we are created from nothing, we are separate from God; we exist simply by

divine fiat, with no ultimate status. If, on the other hand, we are part of the divine essence, we have status and can claim not only divine origin but divine destiny. The Eastern Orthodox tolerance for emanation made possible the doctrine of *theosis*, or deification, which asserts that humankind has the potential to partake of the divine nature.<sup>43</sup> That doctrine looks to 2 *Peter* 1:2 as its primary scriptural basis, but it also draws upon the writings of several church fathers. Notably, Athanasius, third-century patriarch of Alexandria, viewed *theosis* as the complement of Christ's incarnation: "He was made man that we might be made god."<sup>44</sup>

The Reformation brought great changes to ecclesiastical authority and to styles of Christian worship, but it had a minimal impact on western teachings concerning the creator-God. Martin Luther (1483–1546) insisted that doctrine be based solely on scripture, and he was highly critical of Scholasticism. But he left virtually the whole of theistic doctrine in place. John Calvin (1509–1564) placed great emphasis on divine sovereignty: the notion that divine will could never be frustrated by human action: "[T]he will of God is the supreme and primary cause of all things, because nothing happens without his order or permission."<sup>45</sup> That conclusion led Calvin to his doctrine of predestination; if divine sovereignty and mercy were irreconcilable, the latter was the one to be sacrificed. The Calvinist God was to be feared rather than loved, like the Old Testament YHVH. Traces of that attitude persist today in evangelical fundamentalism.

The Copernican Revolution threatened traditional views of God, Earth and humanity. No longer was Earth the center of the universe; it was just one of several planets orbiting the Sun. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) paid the price of ecclesiastical displeasure, but within a few decades Christianity adjusted to the new view of the universe.

Judaism, too, was largely unfazed. The Rabbi Baal Shem Tov (c.1700–1760), affectionately known as "the Besht," declared: "You can understand that there are many heavens above you, and that you are standing on this tiny dot

that is the planet Earth. You can then realize that the entire universe, vast though it may be, is like nothing compared to the infinite Creator."<sup>46</sup> The Besht—born when Isaac Newton was less than sixty years old—never knew how big the universe really was.

As astronomy reached out farther into the depths of space, the problem of reconciling divine transcendence and immanence became ever more serious. Heaven, assumed to lie beyond the boundaries of the physical universe, was pushed ever farther from Earth, and the creator-God became ever more remote from humanity. When astronomical observations placed the Solar System in a galaxy—one of many—theologians stopped even trying to address the implications for the depiction of God.

The Enlightenment, typically dated from the 1620s to the 1780s, sought to exploit institutional religion's discomfort. It offered three possible philosophical positions. One was outright atheism, embraced by an increasing number of academic scientists; another was Deism, popular at the time of the American Revolution, which acknowledged a creator-God but asserted that he no longer paid any attention to his creation. The third was the "God of the gaps," which left God in charge of phenomena which science had not yet explained. Inevitably, as discovery followed discovery, the gaps grew ever narrower, and God was squeezed out. Finally, in 1882, Friedrich Nietzsche's madman cried out in the marketplace: "God is dead."<sup>47</sup>

### ***God in Prayer and Worship***

Contrasting with, yet somehow coexisting with, the transcendent creator-God is the immanent, personal God to whom people can pray and express devotion. Not all ancient religions accommodated a personal God, and even where it was found, patterns of devotion developed more slowly than did belief in the Creator.

Few Greeks sought relationships with their gods, or vice versa. Like other tribal deities, YHVH established a relationship with the Jewish race, through his covenants with Noah, Abraham and Moses. For the most part, he was

a stern and sometimes vengeful God. Sacrifices were offered—as they were in other ancient religions—to assuage divine anger and curry divine favor. Yet devotion was not unknown, and *Deuteronomy* offered the famous prayer known as the *Shema*: “[T]hou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.”<sup>48</sup> Over the course of centuries, the *Shema* became one of the central prayers of Judaism.

Devotion received greater attention in the teachings of Christ. In addition to reiterating the *Shema*, he encouraged the people to call upon a loving God: “Our Father, who art in heaven . . .” Islam, likewise, emphasized the importance of individual and collective prayer. One of the pillars of Islam is *Salat*, or ritual prayer five times a day. God remains in close contact with the world and is deeply concerned with humanity’s problems.

The God of devotion is an immanent, anthropomorphized, and very personal deity. God knows our weaknesses, our needs, even our most secret thoughts. A passage from *Jeremiah*: “Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord.”<sup>49</sup> Christ assured his followers of the Father’s intimate knowledge and concern for humankind—indeed for all creation: “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”<sup>50</sup> The *Qur’an* reminds us that Allah is “Compassionate to each” but also “All-Knowing.”<sup>51</sup>

People turn to God in times of difficulty, petitioning for their own relief or interceding for others’. Not all such prayers are expected to be answered, but belief in the possibility of divine favor is strong enough to provide a basis for hope and comfort. Psalm 46 reminds us that “God is our hope and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Italian bishop and saint Alphonsus Maria de’ Liguori (1696–1787) wrote

Acquire the habit of speaking to God as if you were alone with Him, familiarly and with confidence and love, as to the dearest and most loving of friends. Speak to Him

often of your business, your plans, your troubles, your fears— of everything that concerns you. Converse with Him confidently and frankly.<sup>52</sup>

Petition and intercession are only two of many types of prayer; others are adoration, praise, thanksgiving, penitence, oblation and contemplation. The eighteenth-century Hasidic Jewish writer Nachman Bratzlaver assured us that God welcomes human praise: “The Lord enjoys the praise and sanctification ascending to Him from men more than the adoration he receives from Angels.”<sup>53</sup>

People converse with God to express many impulses. Ecclesiastical authorities encourage private prayer as well as collective, liturgical, prayer. It is no accident that prayer has flourished in a theological environment that emphasizes separation between Creator and creature; prayer helps to ease the pain of perceived separation and to satisfy the longing for union. That said, even people who have a strong sense of an inner God may experience great joy and psychological benefits from prayer.

From time immemorial people have engaged in religious ritual. Animal sacrifice and presentation of the shewbread ceased in Judaism when the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed. However, Jewish worship continued and continues today. Morning and evening prayer services include the *Shema*: “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.” Christian churches celebrate the Mass, or Communion Service, in which bread and wine—according to the beliefs and practices of the particular denomination—commemorate, are associated with, or are transformed into the body and blood of Christ. Other forms of Christian worship focus on prayer, reading from scripture, hymn singing, and/or preaching. In addition to the *Salat*, Islam has many rituals, including Friday congregational prayers; fasting during Ramadan; and the *Haj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Collective worship can evoke a strong experience of the divine presence, as well as communion with fellow worshippers. It strengthens the sense of divine immanence, but when large numbers of people are involved, it can also

enhance the sense of divine transcendence. The great temples, cathedrals and mosques were designed to instill a sense of the majesty of God—and perhaps the power of religious authority.

In ancient times places of worship were considered to be sacred spaces where a god resided. This belief continues to a degree in many religions, most notably in the religions of Asia. People come to temples, individually or in groups, to make ritual offerings, to express adoration, praise or thanksgiving, or to seek divine favors for themselves or others. The belief, overt or otherwise, is that the Divine is more accessible—or more truly present—in the temple than elsewhere. Typical offerings are water, fruit, flowers and incense. Even some prayers are identified with a deity. For example, the *Gayatri* is the name both of a mantra and of the god to whom it is addressed; an English translation from the original Sanskrit is as follows:

Oh God, the Protector, the basis of all life,  
Who is self-existent, Who is free from all  
pains and Whose contact frees the soul  
from all troubles, Who pervades the Uni-  
verse and sustains all, the Creator and En-  
ergizer of the whole Universe, the Giver of  
happiness, Who is worthy of acceptance,  
the most excellent, Who is Pure and the Pu-  
rifier of all, let us embrace that very God,  
so that He may direct our mental faculties  
in the right direction.<sup>54</sup>

Many people, ancient and modern, have shunned sacred buildings to find God in nature. They see the transcendence and majesty of God in the forest, the mountaintop, the ocean, or the vastness of the sky. Hermits seek God in remote places, in the silence and stillness of the wilderness. The desert fathers and mothers of early Christianity were the forerunners of the monastic orders that offered isolation—albeit collective isolation—from the busyness of towns and cities.

Not all religions admit a personal God or encourage a relationship with one. Deism asserts that God is uninterested in its creation, and liberal Christianity attaches little importance to prayer. Yet the saying: “There are no atheists

in foxholes,” affirms that people who do not ordinarily feel moved to pray may do so at times of extreme danger or fear.

### *God of the Mystics*

Prayer and contemplation are central to the discipline of the mystical path. Christian contemplatives distinguish between *kataphatic* and *apophatic* prayer.<sup>55</sup> These terms correspond closely in meaning with kataphatic and apophatic theology, mentioned earlier.

*Kataphatic* prayer employs words, concepts and images in the belief that they assist our understanding of the divine nature and orient us toward God. Often referred to as the “way of affirmation,” it includes the liturgy and virtually all types of popular devotional prayer. Kataphatic prayer is also employed by many contemplatives; one of its most complete expressions is in the *Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius*. Words can also take on a mantric quality, as in the Rosary or the Jesus Prayer.<sup>56</sup>

More often, contemplative prayer is *apophatic*. Apophatic prayer seeks to transcend discursive thought, in the belief that words and images are unhelpful and distracting. It has its critics, who argue that it bypasses doctrinal formulations about God; one critic referred to it as “praying to the void.” Some commonality exists between apophatic prayer and the meditative disciplines of Zen Buddhism.

Contemplative prayer can be a source of great joy. To quote Lebanese-American poet and mystic Kahlil Gibran: “Before my soul became my counsel, I was dull, and weak of hearing, reflecting only upon the tumult and the cry. But, now, I can listen to silence with serenity and can hear in the silence the hymns of ages chanting exaltation to the sky and revealing the secrets of eternity.”<sup>57</sup> The contemplative life is not one, continuous experience of joy, however. The sixteenth-century Spanish mystic John of the Cross famously wrote of the “dark night of the soul,” when God seemed to have deserted him and his spiritual life became “arid.”<sup>58</sup>

At times, contemplative prayer can become so intense as to induce states of ecstasy. In an ecstatic state the mystic may hear voices, see visions, become aware of love on a new level,

or understand reality in an entirely new light. He or she may lose a sense of time, location, and even separate existence. Theresa of Ávila (1515–1582), friend and mentor of John of the Cross, commented: “the soul . . . loses its power of breathing, with the result that . . . it cannot possibly speak. At other times it loses all its powers at once, and the hands and the body grow so cold that the body seems no longer to have a soul.”<sup>59</sup> She pointed out that “[c]omplete ecstasy . . . does not last long,” but it can produce profound and long-lasting after-effects. Some mystics have experienced convulsions or have become comatose.

Mystics are fond of quoting the Latin dictum: *Mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, freely translated as “the terrifying mystery that is also irresistible.” It recalls the psalmist’s words: “For the Lord most high is terrible; he is a great King over all the earth.”<sup>60</sup> The mystic yearns to see God, but even a brief glimpse is overwhelming.

The most accomplished mystics regard these glimpses as only stages on the journey; the real goal is union with God. John of the Cross explained that union was possible after “all that is unlike God and unconformed to Him is cast out,” whereupon “the soul may receive the likeness of God . . . and it will thus be transformed.”<sup>61</sup> “The soul,” he continued, “is at once illumined and transformed in God.”<sup>62</sup> The unitive experience is often compared to the Beatific Vision, which theologians promise the righteous in heaven. A passage in *Isaiah* may refer to the unitive, mystical experience: “men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him.”<sup>63</sup>

In some cases, mystics seek, and apparently find, union with a transcendent God. But many famous mystics, in multiple religions, have encountered a very immanent God, whom they called the Beloved. The Beloved is mentioned thirty-four times in the *Song of Solomon*, thirteen times in chapter 5 alone. A notable verse is: “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so [is] my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and

his fruit [was] sweet to my taste.”<sup>64</sup> The sixteenth-century Bakta yogini Mirabai wrote: “I watered the plant of love I planted with my tears, even as I reaped the fruit of bliss. . . . With love, the Beloved takes me to the other shore.”<sup>65</sup>

In their attempts to communicate the intensity of their love for the Beloved, many mystics have turned to erotic metaphor. The twelfth-century Bernard of Clairvaux wrote no fewer than eighty-six sermons on the *Song of Solomon*, many of them containing erotic images. Bernard nevertheless felt compelled to ask: “[W]hat human affections have you ever experienced . . . that are sweeter than is now experienced from the heart of the Most High?”<sup>66</sup> John of the Cross wrote:

Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover,  
 Lover transformed in the Beloved!  
 Upon my flowery breast, Kept wholly for  
 himself alone, There he stayed sleeping,  
 and I caressed him, And the fanning of the  
 cedars made a breeze.

The breeze blew from the turret As I parted  
 his locks; With his gentle hand he wounded  
 my neck And caused all my senses to be  
 suspended.

I remained, lost in oblivion; My face I re-  
 clined on the Beloved. All ceased and I  
 abandoned myself, Leaving my cares for-  
 gotten among the lilies.<sup>67</sup>

The twentieth-century Indian mystic Meher Baba wrote:

Each and every Lover is the Beloved.  
 Every Beloved is the Lover. The Absolute  
 Unity,  
 which is the Absolute Beauty and Absolute  
 Love,  
 loves its Beloved so intensely it leaves not a  
 trace of it.  
 For in reality there is only the Beloved.<sup>68</sup>

Typically, the mystic pours out his or her love for the Beloved, but occasionally it is the Beloved who speaks. For example, to quote the Sufi Abu-Said Abil-Khayr (967–1049): “The Beloved said: ‘My face is a basket of roses, my hair is the perfume of musk incense burning.’”<sup>69</sup>

The mystics who confront the Beloved engage and converse with a being that is immanent and personal. The Beloved is tangible, even to the point of lying in their arms like a human lover. The argument could be made that Christian mystics are imagining an encounter with Christ. But the universality of the experience across a broad spectrum of religions suggests that the Beloved is some other manifestation of God. What that manifestation might be is an important issue for the present study.

### **Hierarchy of Logoi**

In parallel with the development of theological doctrine by major religious bodies, complementary depictions of God developed, over the centuries, in the teachings of esoteric movements. For example, we have seen that Gnosticism produced very sophisticated models of Deity, including some in which pairs of divine beings expressed polarities at successive levels of reality. The Judaic Kabbalah provided a very concise description of Deity as a descending cascade of manifestations, which included pairs of opposites. Hermeticism and Rosicrucianism were important western esoteric movements, but they did not make significant contributions to our understanding of Deity.

Most important, from the standpoint of our present study, were the trans-Himalayan teachings, believed to have been communicated by members of the Planetary Hierarchy, notably the Masters Morya and Djwhal Khul, to scribes in human embodiment. The first of the scribes was Helena Blavatsky, who published the landmark *The Secret Doctrine* in 1888. Important teachings were also communicated to members of the Theosophical Society, which Blavatsky co-founded, and to individuals like Helena Roerich (1879–1955) and Alice Bailey (1880–1949). The largest body of teachings, relevant to this study, was communicated to Bailey by the Master Djwhal Khul.

The trans-Himalayan teachings qualify as new revelation, but those who transcribed the teachings insist that students should focus on the informational quality of the material rather than on the sources from which the teachings were received. It should be emphasized that

the trans-Himalayan teachings drew upon the religious and philosophical traditions of South Asia but were addressed to a western audience.

The trans-Himalayan teachings envision Deity as a hierarchy of Logoi, or great “Lives.” It is unclear from Blavatsky’s writings whether she regarded Logoi as beings or forces. But the Indian scholar Tallapragada Subba Row (1856–1890), a respected teacher in the early years of the Theosophical Society, affirmed that a Logos “has an objective existence” and “a consciousness of its own.”<sup>70</sup> In the Adyar branch of the Theosophical Society, and in Bailey’s teachings, Logoi became firmly identified as great beings, who ensoul celestial objects like planets, stars and constellations. The celestial objects are their “physical bodies.”<sup>71</sup> Thus *Logos* has taken on a somewhat different meaning in esoteric teachings than it had in traditional Christology, as exemplified by the prologue to the *Gospel of John*.

Of most direct concern to us is our Planetary Logos, the Logos of our Earth. Other Planetary Logoi ensoul Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, Uranus, and so forth. The several planetary Logoi participate in the life of the Solar Logos, the Logos of our Solar System. In turn our Solar Logos participates in the life of a Logos at a higher level.

The Logoi forming the divine hierarchy should not be viewed as separate beings, like managers in a bureaucracy, each supervising subordinates and reporting to a superior. Separateness does not exist at those levels of consciousness. Rather, they comprise a seamless whole. Yet the essence and energy of the Godhead is successively stepped down, and each Logos “colors” what is received from above and adds its “personality,” which gives the celestial body and its lives their unique qualities.

### ***The Planetary Logos***

Earth and its myriad lives comprise the physical body of our Planetary Logos; or, from another perspective, the planet and its lives are expressions of that great Life in whom “we live, and move, and have our being.”<sup>72</sup>

We are told that our Planetary Logos is one of seven “Heavenly Men,” a term first used in

*The Secret Doctrine*, but which also appears frequently in Alice Bailey's writings. Theosophist Charles Leadbeater (1854–1934), who was closely associated with Subba Row, may have been the first to speak of the relationship between the Planetary Logoi and the Solar Logos: "The seven Planetary Logoi, although they are great individual entities, are at the same time aspects of the Solar Logos, force-centers as it were in His body."<sup>73</sup> Bailey reiterated that the seven Logoi "are the seven centers [chakras] in the body of the [Solar] Logos."<sup>74</sup>

According to Bailey, there are seven sacred planets: Vulcan, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune and Uranus, and five non-sacred planets: Mars, Earth, Pluto, the Moon ("veiling a hidden planet"), and the Sun ("veiling a hidden planet").<sup>75</sup> Some of the Heavenly Men evidently ensoul one or more nonsacred planets in addition to the sacred planet that is their primary focus of expression. Our Planetary Logos must be one of them. We do not know which sacred planet our Logos ensouls. A likely candidate would be Venus, described as "Earth's alter ego"<sup>76</sup> and the point of origin from which our Planetary Hierarchy came.<sup>77</sup> Another viable candidate would be Saturn. Each sacred and nonsacred planet lies on one of the seven rays. Earth and Saturn are both third-ray planets, while Venus is a fifth-ray planet.<sup>78</sup>

A Planetary Logos guides his or her planet through a very long period of development, referred to as a *scheme*.<sup>79</sup> A planetary scheme includes seven major "incarnations," or *chains*. In turn, each chain encompasses seven *globes*. The globes are believed to come into existence one at a time, and to pass out of existence one at a time. But during most of a chain's duration, all seven globes may exist simultaneously, interpenetrating one another like the "bodies" (dense physical, etheric, astral, and so forth) of the human constitution.<sup>80</sup>

Earth's previous incarnation was the Moon Chain, and the corpse of its densest globe is the Moon we see up in the sky. Our planet is currently in its fourth chain. The rocks under our feet belong to the fourth globe of the fourth

chain, which represents the midpoint, and the very deepest descent into materialization, of the entire Earth scheme. We can look forward, over the remainder of this chain and the three forthcoming chains, to a gradual rarification of our planetary home and relief from the woes associated with life in dense physical forms.

### *The Solar Logos*

Whereas Planetary Logoi were referred to as "Heavenly Men," the solar Logos is termed "the Grand Man of the Heavens" in Bailey's works. Later in this article we shall equate the God of traditional religion to a combination of the Planetary and Solar Logoi. But Leadbeater boldly singled out the latter for that role:

We have in the Logos of our Solar System as near an approach to a personal (or rather, perhaps, individual) God as any reasonable man can desire, for of Him is true everything good that has ever been predicated of a personal deity. . . . [S]o far as His system is concerned He possesses omniscience, omnipresence, omnipotence ; the love, the power, the wisdom, the glory, all are there in fullest measure. Yet He is a mighty Individual—a trinity in unity, and God in very truth."<sup>81</sup>

The Solar Logos is usually depicted in the esoteric literature as embracing the seven Planetary Logoi and ensouling the major planets. Yet we must assume that the Logos' physical body also includes the dwarf planets, smaller bodies, and radiation belts that also comprise the Solar System. As Leadbeater pointed out: "The *whole* of our solar system is a manifestation of its Logos."<sup>82</sup>

According to Bailey, the body of the Solar Logos is "spheroidal in shape."<sup>83</sup> She reiterated its inclusiveness is space and time:

His ring-pass-not comprises the entire circumference of the Solar System, and all that is included within the sphere of

influence of the Sun. The Sun holds a position analogous to the nucleus of life at the centre of the atom. This sphere comprises within its periphery the seven planetary chains with the synthesizing three, making the ten of logoi manifestation. The Sun is

the physical body of the solar Logos, His body of manifestation, and His life sweeps cycling through the seven schemes in the same sense as the life of a planetary Logos sweeps seven times around His scheme of seven chains.<sup>84</sup>

The Solar Logos is triune, expressing the divine aspects of Will and Power, Love – Wisdom, and Active Intelligence. The triune nature can, in that sense, be compared with the Christian trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In another sense, the triune nature expresses itself through three “incarnations” of the Solar System. The first Solar System expressed the third aspect of Active Intelligence. Our present Solar System expresses the second aspect of Love-Wisdom. And a future Solar System will express the first aspect of Will and Power. “These three aspects of God, the solar Logos, and the Central Energy or Force (for the terms are occultly synonymous) demonstrate through seven centers of force,—three major centers and four minor.”<sup>85</sup>

### ***The One About Whom Naught May Be Said***

Alice Bailey referred to the One About Whom Naught May Be Said, “the Logos of the cosmic scheme of which our [solar] system is but a part,”<sup>86</sup> and “the Logos of our Solar Logos.”<sup>87</sup> The difference in scale can be gleaned from the comment: “[O]n cosmic levels of a high order the solar Logos is an Intelligence as relatively low in the order of cosmic consciousness as man is in relation to solar consciousness. He is but a cell in the body of the ONE ABOUT WHOM NAUGHT MAY BE SAID.”<sup>88</sup>

The apophatic title: “One About Whom Naught May Be Said,” stems from the fact that “all formulation of ideas about His life and purpose are impossible until one has completed the term of evolution in our solar system.”<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, we understand that this great entity ensouls seven solar systems<sup>90</sup>—ours and six others—and “they are linked up astrologically with the constellations, the Great Bear, the Pleiades, and Sirius.”<sup>91</sup> Indeed, three of its major chakras (or “centers”) are the star Sirius, a star in the Great Bear (Ursa Major) constella-

tion, and the star cluster Pleiades. Our solar system may be its heart chakra.<sup>92</sup>

Evidently it is meaningful to make comparisons between groups of these chakras and chakras in the human constitution:

Our solar system, with the Pleiades and one of the stars of the Great Bear, form a cosmic triangle, or an aggregation of three centers in the Body of HIM OF WHOM NAUGHT MAY BE SAID. The seven stars in the constellation of the Great Bear are the correspondences to the seven head centers in the body of that Being, greater than our Logos. Again, two other systems, when allied with the solar system and the Pleiades, make a lower quaternary which are eventually synthesized into the seven head centers in much the same way as in the human being after the fourth initiation.<sup>93</sup>

Energies of various kinds flow from the One About Whom Naught May Be Said to our planet, to humanity, and even to us as individuals:

First and foremost is the energy or force emanating from the sun Sirius. If it might be so expressed, the energy of thought, or mind force, in its totality, reaches the Solar System from a distant cosmic centre via Sirius. Sirius acts as the transmitter, or the focalizing centre, whence emanate those influences which produce self-consciousness in man. . . .

Another type of energy reaches man from the Pleiades, passing through the Venusian scheme to us, just as the Sirian energy passes through the Saturnian. It has a definite effect upon the causal body, and serves to stimulate the heart center.

A third type of energy is applied to the initiate, and affects his head center. It emanates from that one of the seven stars of the Great Bear whose ensouling life holds the same relationship to our Planetary Logos as the Ego does to a human being. This energy, therefore, is seven-fold, and differs according to a man's ray or type.<sup>94</sup>



We also learn that the seven rays emanate from the Great Bear:

The seven stars of the Great Bear are the originating sources of the seven rays of our Solar System. The seven Rishis (as They are called) of the Great Bear express Themselves through the medium of the seven planetary Logoi Who are Their Representatives and to Whom They stand in the relation of cosmic Prototype. The seven planetary Gods manifest through the medium of the seven sacred planets. Each of these seven rays is transmitted into our Solar System through the medium of three constellations and their ruling planets.<sup>95</sup>

Sirius, the Great Bear (Ursa Major), and the Pleiades all lie within the Milky Way Galaxy and are relative neighbors of our solar system. Sirius, a binary star and the brightest star in the night sky, is 8.6 light-years from Earth. The nearest star in the constellation Ursa Major is about eight light-years away, while the brightest (Alioth) is about eighty-three light-years away. The brightest star in the Pleiades cluster (Alcyone) is about 400 light-years away. We recall that the solar system is 27,000 light-years from the galactic center. The physical body of the One About Whom Naught May be Said appears to occupy a relatively small region of the Milky Way.

Constellations are groups of stars that appear to be in the same region of the sky, as viewed from Earth. What we see is a two-dimensional projection on the “dome of the firmament.” The stars identified with a constellation do not necessarily form a cluster in three-dimensional space. Ursa Major is not a cluster; some of its component stars are much farther than others from Earth.<sup>96</sup> Yet the constellation evidently functions as a unit within the “body” of the One About Whom Naught May be Said.

### ***Beyond the Beyond***

The number of levels in the hierarchy of Logoi has not been revealed. Multiple levels may exist within the Milky Way, and the whole galaxy is presumably ensouled by a Logos immensely more powerful than the One About Whom Naught May be Said. As we move from

the Milky Way to the Local Group, the Virgo Cluster, and Supercluster Laniakea, each of their respective Logoi must be substantially more powerful than the one before it, and its level of consciousness must increase accordingly. The hierarchy of Logoi contains many levels; in organizational terms, we say that it is a *tall* hierarchy.<sup>97</sup>

Logoi had already attained exalted status by the time their planetary schemes, star systems, or galactic systems came into being. Their eons-long evolution may have taken them through phases resembling human existence. Indeed, we are told that one of the options available to initiates who have completed their terms on Earth will take them on that path.<sup>98</sup>

Meanwhile, Logoi continue to evolve in consciousness, and we have to assume that the physical vehicles through which their lives are expressed will eventually become inadequate to support further growth. Planetary systems go through a long process of evolution—their schemes—and then pass out of existence, allowing their Logoi to move elsewhere. Stars, too, go through a process of evolution, leading, according to current astrological opinion, either to collapse into a dwarf star or to explosion as a supernova. Such physical events no doubt have esoteric significance. For example, the explosion of a supernova may signal a major initiation of its ensouling Logos.<sup>99</sup>

At the scale of the observable Universe, or beyond it, we come to the Godhead, equivalent to the Brahman, or Para-Brahman,<sup>100</sup> of Hinduism, and the Ain Soph of the Kabbalah. The Godhead is our extrapolation from the first few levels in the hierarchy of Logoi. We can point in the direction of the Godhead, but it is utterly transcendent, remote, unknown and unknowable.

### **The Human Monad**

**A**n old Hindu legend relates that the gods came together to decide where to hide man’s divinity, where it could be found only by the most dedicated seeker. They considered burying it deep in the earth, in the deepest ocean, or at the top of the highest mountain. But none of those places was judged to be safe

enough. Brahma finally decided to hide that divinity in the center of man's own being, for we would never think to look for it there.

Hinduism teaches that the eternal and "real" part of the human constitution is the Atman, identical in essence with the universal Atman. We read in the Bhagavad Gita: "Know this Atman / Unborn, undying, Never ceasing, / Never beginning, / Unchanging for ever. / How can It die / The death of the body?"<sup>101</sup> Man is a divine being. That divinity may be latent in the majority of people, but it remains an indestructible affirmation of our divine destiny.

The Greeks considered the *nous* ("rational mind") and the *pneuma* ("spirit") to be higher, more enduring, aspects of the human constitution than the transient physical body—and higher than the *psyche*, or "soul," that animates the physical body. The Stoics of the third century BCE placed the *pneuma* on a more exalted level than the *nous*, believing it to be a fragment of the spirit of Zeus, the cosmic *Pneuma*. It was the divine spark that affirmed man's divine origins and destiny.<sup>102</sup> The influential Gnostic teacher Valentinus (c.100–c.160 CE) also regarded the *pneuma* as the divine spark in man.<sup>103</sup> The Neoplatonists regarded the *pneuma* as the human counterpart of the divine *Monas*, the highest aspect of their trinity.

Early Christianity embraced the Greek notion of the *pneuma*, regarding it as higher than the soul and body. The Apostle Paul prayed that "your whole spirit [*pneuma*] and soul [*psyche*] and body be preserved blameless unto the

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>104</sup> In the *Magnificat*, Mary, likewise, referred to the *pneuma*: "My soul [*psyche*] doth magnify the Lord, And my spirit [*pneuma*] hath rejoiced in God my Savior."<sup>105</sup> Western Christianity later

allowed the *pneuma* to be absorbed into the *psyche*. The Fourth Council of Constantinople (869) decreed that man "has one rational and intellectual soul" whose primary role was to "animate the flesh."<sup>106</sup> By denying humankind a divine spark, western Christianity was denying us our divine origin and destiny.

Belief in a divine spark remained

relatively strong in the Eastern Orthodox Churches. And despite ecclesiastical disapproval, similar belief continued among certain western mystics, mystical theologians, and poets. Meister Eckhart (1260–1328) spoke of the *Seelenfünklein*, literally "spark of the soul" but often rendered in English translations as "citadel of the soul" or "light of the soul."<sup>107</sup> In his words: "There is something in the soul which is only God . . . . For herein the soul takes its whole life and being and from this source it draws its life and being."<sup>108</sup> His views on the divine spark were condemned by Rome, but others agreed with him. Sixteenth-century mystic Theresa of Ávila discussed "the spirit in the soul,"<sup>109</sup> and eighteenth-century Anglican clergyman William Law wrote of the hidden "pearl of eternity" in the center of the soul.<sup>110</sup> Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809–1892) wrote: "Follow you the Star that lights a desert pathway, yours or mine. / Forward, till you see the highest Human Nature is divine."<sup>111</sup>

Several western philosophers considered the *Monad* in the sense of the Neoplatonic *Monas*, or all-encompassing reality. Gottfried von

**Esotericists must avoid a smug certainty that we are right and others are wrong. God—transcendent and immanent—is larger than any body of teachings, even modern esoteric teachings. Synthesis will emerge over time, but it will never be complete. The highest entities of whom we are aware would insist that their understanding of Deity is limited. At the human level, we must accept the limitations on our own knowledge and respect some diversity of understanding.**

Leibniz (1646–1716) was not only a brilliant mathematician—he invented the calculus independently of Isaac Newton—he also proposed the theory of individual Monads. Monads, he determined, were the ultimate elements of the universe: “Monads are the real atoms of nature,” the elements of created things.<sup>112</sup> Those created things include ourselves.

God creates and holds Monads in existence: “God alone is the primary unity or original simple substance, of which all created or derivative Monads are products and have their birth.”<sup>113</sup> Importantly, the functionality of the Monad in its own domain, and its relationship with the universal Monad, are governed by divine order:

[E]very Monad is, in its own way, a mirror of the universe, and as the universe is ruled according to a perfect order, there must also be order in that which represents it, i.e. in the perceptions of the soul, and consequently there must be order in the body, through which the universe is represented in the soul.<sup>114</sup>

Leibniz’ theory of Monads anticipated, in remarkable detail, the trans-Himalayan teachings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Tallapragada Subba Row identified the Monad as an emanation of the Logos, which remains in existence “for perhaps millions of years, till Pralaya comes—this time can be almost called infinity.”<sup>115</sup> At the end of its life, the Monad is “transferred into the Logos . . . and becomes part of the life of the Logos.”<sup>116</sup>

Theosophist Geoffrey Hodson defined the Monad as “a fragment of Divinity, a concentration of Universal Spirit, with which in origin, nature, substance, and potentiality it is identical.”<sup>117</sup> The Monad is the fragment of the Logoic essence: the source of life, sustaining our very existence throughout the very long journey of our descent into form and our slow ascent back to Spirit.

The trans-Himalayan teachings assert that the human constitution is threefold, consisting of personality, soul and Monad. The teachings

distinguish soul from spirit in much the same way as did the Stoics, Neoplatonists, and early Christians. The Monad is the Will aspect of the human constitution, whereas the soul is the Consciousness aspect; the personality is the Activity aspect. The three aspects of the human constitution correspond, at the level of the microcosm, to the three aspects of Deity that Christians refer to as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

For long eons the lower self has no conscious contact with the Monad. Alice Bailey explained, however, that upon attainment of the third initiation “conscious recognition of the Monad becomes possible.”<sup>118</sup> The experience of gaining the first glimpse of our Divine Spark, often compared with the transfiguration of Christ, may be overwhelming: “the entire personality is flooded with light from above.”<sup>119</sup> Moreover, after the third initiation “the Monad is definitely guiding the Ego [the soul].”<sup>120</sup> We progress into a new relationship with Deity, one in which the inner God may speak as loudly as the external God.

## Toward Synthesis

### *What is Divine?*

An important challenge in working toward a synthesis of religious and esoteric concepts of God is the meaning of “divine.” This section deals specifically with Christianity, but some of the same issues arise in Judaism and Islam.

Western Christianity typically divides reality into two distinct categories. “God”—including the persons of the trinity—is deemed to be divine. The physical universe, the kingdoms of nature, the saints and angels, even Mary the “Mother of God,” are not divine. Christianity’s rejection of emanation in favor of *ex nihilo* creation made that separation inevitable. Whatever is created by God is, by definition, *not* God.

Christianity’s separation between the divine and the non-divine is unbridgeable, with two exceptions. One exception is the incarnation of the Second Person of the Trinity as Jesus Christ. The other is the Eastern Orthodox doctrine of theosis that allows for certain individu-

als to “partake of the divine nature.”<sup>121</sup> Theosis is the inverse or complement of Christ’s incarnation: the Word became flesh, allowing flesh to become the Word.

Esoteric teachings embrace the Neoplatonic notion of emanation, in which reality at all levels flows from, or is birthed by, the Logos in a continuous cascade of divine essence. The sharp dichotomy between the divine and the non-divine is replaced by a continuous spectrum, extending from the dense physical world to the Godhead. Beings from the various kingdoms find their place on that spectrum. Human beings are more divine than rocks, Christ is more divine than we are, and the Logoi are still more divine.

Traditional Christians would object that the esoteric definition of divine diminishes the difference between us and Christ; Christ is God incarnate, but so are we, and so are the rocks we stand on. For the theologians, the esoteric Christ is *not divine enough*. Exacerbating the matter, the trans-Himalayan teachings declare that Christ is a member of the human family who attained his present status via the initiatory path.<sup>122</sup>

To facilitate discussions with traditional Christians, esotericists might agree to a division between non-divine and divine, based on levels of consciousness. If another being’s level of consciousness were so much higher than our own as to suggest a completely different order of reality, that being could be described as “divine.” While there might be debate over where the cut-off lies, one suggestion is that it lies at or beyond the stage of “relative perfection” represented by the fifth initiation.

Christ is in process of attaining the seventh initiation, which involves merging his will with that of the Planetary Logos.<sup>123</sup> Furthermore, Christ is establishing links with Logoi greater than our Planetary Logos—even greater than our Solar Logos. For example, we read that “the seventh initiation makes the Adept a Master Mason of the Brotherhood on Sirius.”<sup>124</sup> Elsewhere we read:

At the seventh Initiation his [the initiate’s] vision penetrates beyond the solar ring-

pass-not, and he sees that which he has long realized as a basic theoretical fact, that our solar Logos is involved in the plans and purposes of a still greater Existence, and that the Solar System is but one of many centers of force through which a cosmic Entity vastly greater than our own solar Logos is expressing Himself.<sup>125</sup>

Christ’s links with Logoi higher than the Solar and higher Logoi give him a status potentially greater than traditional Christian doctrine does.

Traditional Christians would also charge esotericists with the heresy of Arianism: that their Christ was not always divine; that he is a creature, not one with the Creator, “begotten of the Father before all worlds.”<sup>126</sup> Yet the charge of Arianism is a “straw man,” a product of western religion’s embrace of ex-nihilo creation over the doctrine of emanation. Esotericists argue that all Monads—ours, Christ’s, and those of every life in the Solar System—are fragments of the Logoic essence. The esoteric Christ was indeed with God from the Beginning, “God from God, Light from Light.”<sup>127</sup>

Traditional Christians would still complain that the esoteric Christ is not “the only-begotten Son of God.”<sup>128</sup> Esoteric teachings confirm that other individuals have attained the seventh initiation—though not ones who individualized on Earth’s present chain. In order to address this issue we must examine where the religious “God” fits into the hierarchy of Logoi.

### ***Who or What is “God”?***

What Jews, Christians and Muslims call “God” can most readily be equated to a combination of the Planetary and Solar Logoi. We, our Monads, are fragments of the Planetary Logoic essence, but the “transcendent” God of western religion may be represented more closely by the Solar Logos. The Sun God of early civilizations provides an important pointer in this regard.

The higher Logoi provide the link between the God who maintains a close interest in us and our world and the immeasurably more powerful Deity who created and rules over the universe. No information has been revealed about

the higher Logoi, but what we have been told about the Planetary and Solar Logoi, and the “One About Whom Naught May Be Said” can be extrapolated to as many levels as might be needed to encompass the observable universe—and any other universes that may exist. The Godhead may reign above the whole hierarchy.

Western religion has tried to make “God”—particularly the “simple” Thomist God—play too many roles: roles that are inherently incompatible, like transcendent and immanent; abstract and personal; creator of the universe, judge of humanity, and compassionate friend. When challenged, theologians might remind us that an omnipotent God can play an infinity of roles. But the charge of incompatibility does not question divine omnipotence; rather, it questions the ability of a “simple” being to communicate across vast differences in consciousness. Something “internal” to God is necessary to step down the power and level of consciousness to make it accessible to each level of reality. We would need some comparable mechanism to enable us to communicate with an amoeba.

Alternatively, theologians might retreat to the position that what we view as incompatibilities are divine mysteries, which we cannot and should not penetrate. Yet we are thinking beings; “man” and “humanity” come from the Sanskrit *manas*, which means “mind.” Esoteric teachings demonstrate that these mysteries can be penetrated to a significant extent. We do not have all the answers, but—like the Scholastics—we are making an effort to understand higher reality. Those coming after us will have new insights, will receive new revelation, and will carry the process forward.

Western religion has never been unanimous in its assertion of Thomist divine simplicity. Yet the great body of the faithful, and even many theologians, are unaware of Gnostic and Kabbalistic depictions of Deity as a hierarchy of divine beings. Most are equally unaware of—and in the first instance would likely be hostile to—esoteric teachings on the hierarchy of Logoi. Nevertheless, insistence on the simplicity of God has not only caused problems in under-

standing the trinity and God’s simultaneous transcendence and immanence, it is a major stumbling block to reconciling theology with modern scientific discovery.

The existence of multiple Logoi does not imply some kind of polytheism. As already noted, the Logoi are distinct, but they are not “separate” from one another. When we turn our eyes to the Deity, we are not looking at multiple lights; rather, we are looking at a distant and overpoweringly bright Light, the Godhead, through a long series of lenses. Each Logoic lens filters the Light, so that it does not blind us. It also creates the “personality” of the planet, planetary system, galaxy, or cluster that the particular Logos ensouls. We look at the Light through one set of lenses. An intelligent being on an exoplanet in, say, the galaxy Andromeda, would see the same Light through a different set of lenses, at least at the lower levels. The higher lenses would be common to whole galactic clusters. Perhaps at some level there is a single lens.

Particularly unpalatable to the religious mind is the suggestion that “Almighty God” might lie at the bottom of a tall hierarchy. But the scriptural God, even the “all-powerful” God of the Middle Ages was, in fact, quite limited in power and responsibility—concerned just with our planet and humanity, though still powerful enough to inspire fear, awe and devotion in the faithful. Careful reflection shows that the esoteric depiction of Deity is an expansion, not a diminution, of God. Understanding the Deity as a hierarchy of Logoi allows for divine responsibilities to be handled at every level of reality. The Planetary and Solar Logoi handle the responsibilities on the “local” level. The higher Logoi have correspondingly greater responsibilities, and are immeasurably more powerful than the God of western religion.

Esotericists can rightly take issue with the traditional Christian depiction of Christ as the *only* son of God. This depiction suggests that other “humanities” are left unredeemed, or that they have to share in our redemption, though their circumstances might be radically different. More reasonably, and with all due reverence to an individuality of enormous signifi-

cance, Christ can be considered the “only son” of our planetary Logos. Other Planetary—and Exoplanetary—Logoi are accorded the right to redeem their humanities through their own sons or daughters.

The notion of a God associated with our planet—or with the Solar System—is not new. In Greek mythology, the Earth was personified by the goddess Gaia, who bore the gods of the classical pantheon through her union with Uranus (the Sky), and the sea gods through her union with Pontus. The God of scripture certainly was a planetary God. The Sun, Moon, and stars visible to the naked eye were all viewed as supplementary to, supportive of, and most importantly *close to Earth*.

Discussion of a planetary God has resurfaced very recently. Nancy Ellen Abrams, who described herself as an atheist in search of a higher power, conceived of a planetary God that is an emergent property of human aspiration—based on the view that the latter is a “system” with sufficient complexity to produce self-organizing phenomena. Abrams asserted: “The emerging God is not universal. It’s *planetary*—a phenomenon of Earth. It is humanity’s God.”<sup>129</sup> She added: “*God transcends us, but the universe transcends God.*”<sup>130</sup> Abrams suggested that intelligences elsewhere in the universe might have comparable emergent gods. Moreover, “[s]omewhere in the very, very distant future, some new emergent phenomenon might even arise from all those gods interacting.”<sup>131</sup> The result presumably would be a meta-God reigning over the several planetary gods.

That speculation takes Abrams toward an understanding of the hierarchy of Logoi described by esoteric teachings—except in one crucial respect. She is proposing a bottom-up model of Deity, stemming from the belief that form creates consciousness; by contrast, esoteric teachings insist that consciousness creates form. The higher Logoi will not emerge from human, or human-like, aspiration “in the very, very distant future.” They were there from the very beginning, the creators of worlds and the lives that inhabit them.

## **Practical Steps**

The mismatch between western theology and modern science can easily create mental compartmentalism—a state in which one area of belief coexists uneasily and uncomfortably with one or more others. Stresses arise along their interfaces, like the shear stresses between tectonic plates. Those mental stresses may be repressed into the unconscious mind, eventually causing neuroses. Or they may remain conscious, become unbearable, and are resolved either by the “loss of faith” or by retreat into anti-science fundamentalism. For religion as a whole, the stark options may be fundamentalism or a decline into irrelevance.

Western religion needs to consider a new concept of Deity. Students of the trans-Himalayan teachings might wish for the wholesale acceptance of the concept of a hierarchy of Logoi. However, a useful first step would be for theologians to embrace a simplified model in which a planetary/solar God is distinguished from, say, a God of the universe or the transcendent Godhead. Technical terminology and more information on the higher Logoi—to the extent that it has been revealed—can be filled in later.

Even an intermediate step of this nature, concerning such a fundamental principle of doctrine, would be difficult for theologians and those who look to them for guidance. Religious dogma has built-in systems to ensure survival in the face of new knowledge. Those systems include the ongoing *magisterium ordinarium* of authoritative teachings as well as the pervasive conservatism of all religious belief.<sup>132</sup> Any suggestion that fundamental beliefs might need revision raises intense anxiety in the religious mind. Defensiveness on the part of the masses, as well as on the part of religious authorities, poses a formidable challenge to the acceptance of new teachings.

Esotericists may have good reason to believe in the superiority of their concept of Deity, but caution, patience—and humility—are needed in efforts to persuade their brothers and sisters in traditional religions to modify their under-

standing of God. A clumsy intellectual assault on traditional theology would not only be pointless, it would be divisive and make future conversations more difficult. Esotericists need to engage members of traditional religions sensitively, make them aware of pertinent esoteric teachings, and allow the power of the teachings to speak for itself. In return, esoteric teachings can be enriched, and esotericists may find new avenues for discipleship work.

Some esotericists have gone on record, claiming that religion is in its death throes, whereupon conversations on theological and other issues are pointless. But the trans-Himalayan teachings point to the emergence of a New World Religion, in which outworn forms will be discarded, but what is good will be preserved and built upon.<sup>133</sup> Even if western religion has an outmoded understanding of God, it has motivated great works of service and has nourished the spiritual growth of millions of people.

### ***The Beloved***

An essentially different problem arises in connection with religious experience of a personal God. And in this case, esoteric teachings may not offer an adequate solution. We have examined two examples of such experience: by the masses of devout people and by individuals of obvious spiritual stature. Even if the experiences of the former were to be dismissed as unworthy of scholarly study, that of the mystics demands consideration. The key question is: Who or what is the mystics' Beloved? We have already noted that the experience extends far beyond Christianity, ruling out the possibility that the Beloved is a vision of Christ.

The case could be made that the mystics are simply encountering a phantasm of their own imagination: astral matter ensouled by a thoughtform of their own pious creation. Yet many mystics who reported encounters with the Beloved seem to have risen above the level of astral consciousness.

Mysticism is often belittled by esotericists, and certain passages in the trans-Himalayan literature have been interpreted as equating it to simple devotion: appropriate to the path of as-

piration but of no value to discipleship work. Yet Alice Bailey associates a predisposition to mysticism or occultism to ray type. She urges the mystic to "work at the forms upon the Rays of Aspect, and so develop knowledge of the concrete side of Nature—that side which works under law"; she also urges the occultist to pursue "forms on the abstract or attributive rays" to develop the mystical nature. Eventually, "the time comes when the paths merge and all forms are alike to the Initiate."<sup>134</sup> Clearly, mysticism and occultism are of comparable value, and elements of both are needed for balanced growth in consciousness.

Alternatively, the case could be made that the Beloved is a vision of the Monad. Certain mystics have probably attained the third initiation which would give them their first glimpse of the Divine Spark within them. Perhaps the influx of light could explain the *mysterium tremendum*. But the Monad is unlikely to manifest itself as a personage; nowhere in esoteric teachings do we find it depicted in such a manner. A great deal of filtering would be needed to transform the light of the Monad into a personage who visits the mystics, converses with them, even lies in their arms.

A third possibility is that mystics are encountering their Solar Angels. The intimate relationship that develops could be associated with the mystic marriage said to take place between the soul-infused personality and the Solar Angel, prior to the latter's departure at the fourth initiation.<sup>135</sup> A problem with this explanation is that male mystics invariably describe a male Beloved, whereupon their poetic imagery is often mistaken for evidence of homosexuality. By contrast, the Solar Angel is commonly believed to reveal itself with a gender opposite to that of the personality, creating an attractive polarity leading to the mystical marriage. That sexual polarity complements the polarity between spirit (masculine) and matter (feminine) that exists, regardless of the gender of the personality.<sup>136</sup>

None of these explanations seems adequate to explain the phenomenon of the Beloved, leaving us in need of new insights to bridge the gap between religious experience and esoteric

teachings. Here, esotericists could benefit from studying the mystical experience with respect and understanding, and from a willingness to learn from the writings of the great mystics of the past and lectures by contemporary mystics. Participation in contemplative practices would be even more valuable, possibly leading to the insights needed to extend esoteric teachings.

## Concluding Remarks

Throughout history, humankind's understanding of God has been guided by experiences of the inner and outer worlds. People's experiences included personal insights as well as observations and interpretations of the world around them. As people gained more knowledge of the universe, their concept of God expanded. The concept of God also expanded as people became more introspective; explored the inner life of prayer, devotion and mysticism; and in due course expressed their experiences through group relationships and service.

Our understanding of God has also been guided by revelation in various forms, historical and ongoing. Esoteric teachings on the Ageless Wisdom affirm that new knowledge has been revealed whenever humankind reached a stage of evolution when that knowledge was needed and could be assimilated. One of the products of revelation has been the emergence of institutional religions. Religious bodies tend to place great emphasis on the revelation that brought them into being, but soon they enshrine it in dogma and ignore or reject new revelation. Similarly, religious bodies may incorporate an understanding of the physical world current in their infancy but then ignore or resist the theological implications of new scientific discovery.

Few religious leaders today would question the reality that Earth is a planet which orbits the Sun, the Sun is part of a galaxy, and other galaxies exist besides our own. But the biblical mindset is so ingrained in the religious consciousness that one could easily gain the impression from sermons, collective prayer, and the religious literature that we still live on a flat Earth, and God lives just above the clouds.

In a stereotypical example of the crystallization of forms, religious doctrine clings to a depiction of God justifiable two millennia ago, but which is difficult or impossible to reconcile with what we now know of the universe. Western religion missed the opportunity to benefit either from science or from ongoing revelation. In the process, it has harmed its own credibility, threatened the faith of its members—including some of its greatest intellectuals and mystics—and diminished the respect of the scientific community.

Esoteric teachings on the hierarchy of Logoi offer a description of Deity that can be reconciled with scientific cosmology, and help explain how Deity can simultaneously focus on, and communicate across, multiple levels of reality and consciousness. A Logoi hierarchy can ensoul the whole range of celestial bodies, from the universe down to the planet we live on—and exoplanets on which other sentient, thinking beings may live. Planetary Logoi can maintain a close interest in their worlds and their inhabitants. Yet they share in the life of the whole hierarchy and the Godhead that may transcend it.

Western religion is emerging from the closed-mindedness and defensiveness of the past. Correspondingly, esotericists—and many scientists—are shedding the anti-religious attitudes common a century ago. Unique opportunities now exist for mutual engagement and discussion of theological issues, which could result in the enrichment of religious theology, esoteric teachings, and the philosophy of science.

Few works of service would be more far-reaching in their effects than the formulation of a common understanding of Deity, accessible to, and acceptable by, the masses, theologians and religious authorities, the scientific community, and the worldwide esoteric community.

The notion of emanation explains how Deity penetrates to the very depths of our being. Esoteric teachings on the Planetary Logos and on the individualized human Monad go a long way to explaining what theologians call the immanence of God. The one weakness in esoteric teachings seems to be an adequate de-



scription of the personage whom mystics call “the Beloved.” Unless we dismiss the mystics’ experience as “astralism”—a rash characterization in view of their spiritual status—we must look to new insights to provide a satisfactory explanation.

In this instance, esotericists have much to learn from the great mystics. Opportunities exist, particularly for disciples on certain rays to participate in contemplative practices to glimpse some of the experiences that mystics discuss. As Alice Bailey pointed out, the occult and mystical faculties need to be brought into balance.

Esotericists must avoid a smug certainty that we are right and others are wrong. God—transcendent and immanent—is larger than any body of teachings, even modern esoteric teachings. Synthesis will emerge over time, but it will never be complete. The highest entities of whom we are aware would insist that their understanding of Deity is limited. At the human level, we must accept the limitations on our own knowledge and respect some diversity of understanding. Contrasting visions of God can exist side-by-side like panes in a beautiful stained-glass window. “We are more cultured, richer and wiser when we let alternative visions coexist ecologically and harmoniously.”<sup>137</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Psalm* 139:2. See also *Ezekiel* 28:3.

<sup>2</sup> Rudolf Bultmann *New Testament and Mythology* (trans.: S. M. Ogden; Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1941), 12.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951–1963).

<sup>5</sup> In this article “modern esoteric teachings” refer to esoteric teachings disseminated over the last 150 years.

<sup>6</sup> *Exodus* 20:4.

<sup>7</sup> Several Near Earth Objects, including the quasi-satellite Cruithne, orbit the Sun in resonance with Earth. From time to time one of these is claimed to be our second “moon.”

<sup>8</sup> This estimate corresponds to the heliopause, the outer boundary of the bubble of plasma flowing from the Sun. Up to 100 times farther

from the Sun lies the Oort Cloud, from which comets are believed to originate.

<sup>9</sup> The orbital velocities of stars within the Milky Way do not decrease with distance from the galactic center at a rate comparable with that of planets in the Solar System. Rather, our galaxy rotates more like a solid body, an observation that many astronomers attribute to the presence of dark matter.

<sup>10</sup> Laniakea may not be the largest “structure” in the universe. Recent observations have identified a *void*—a region of fewer than average galaxies—estimated to be more than one billion light-years across.

<sup>11</sup> The estimated diameter of the observable universe is 93 billion light-years. One may ask how its radius:  $93/2 = 46.5$  billion light-years, can be greater than the distance light could travel in the age of the universe, estimated to be 13.8 billion years. The answer lies in cosmic expansion: space itself expanded, especially in the early life of the universe.

<sup>12</sup> A million is six orders of magnitude, a trillion is twelve orders of magnitude.

<sup>13</sup> Although no massive object can travel faster than light, cosmic expansion may be carrying distant regions of the universe away from us at a higher apparent speed.

<sup>14</sup> The belief that there may be multiple deities, but one’s family, tribe or nation owes exclusive loyalty to a particular God, is sometimes referred to as henotheism.

<sup>15</sup> Since classical Hebrew contained no vowels, the pronunciation of YHVH is not known, and the name was never uttered outside the temple. “Jehovah” and “Yahweh” are merely Gentile speculations, attempts to form a pronounceable name to satisfy western tastes.

<sup>16</sup> *Exodus* 20:3.

<sup>17</sup> See for example Karen Armstrong, *A History of God* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1994), 74.

<sup>18</sup> *John* 1:1.

<sup>19</sup> *Qur’an*, 3:110, 113, 199. All quotations from the Qur’an are taken from Tarif Khalidi, *The Qur’an: A New Translation* (New York: Viking Press, 2008).

<sup>20</sup> Donna M. Brown, “Duality and Non-Duality: Awakening to Unified Perspective,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2010), 61-74.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:163.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 59:23-24.

<sup>23</sup> *Psalm* 19:1.

<sup>24</sup> *Homilies of S. John Chrysostom* (Oxford: Parker, 1842), homily IX, 165.

<sup>25</sup> *Qur'an* 13:2.

<sup>26</sup> Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee, "Anima Mundi: Awakening the Soul of the World," *Sufi Journal*, Issue 67, Autumn 2005. Online: [http://www.goldensufi.org/a\\_animamundi.html](http://www.goldensufi.org/a_animamundi.html). Last accessed July 22, 2015.

<sup>27</sup> *Genesis* 1: 1, The creation stories in the first two books of *Genesis* are believed to have been based on earlier legends.

<sup>28</sup> *Nicene Creed*.

<sup>29</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* (trans: J. F. Shaw; 413-426 CE, book 8), ch. 11.

<sup>30</sup> For a brief discussion of the broad reach of Scholasticism see Richard Harvey, "The Influence of Scholasticism on the Thought Structures of Judaism, Christianity and Islam from the Middle Ages until the Present." Online: [http://www.sttonline.org/files/STT08\\_2\\_Harvey\\_EN.pdf](http://www.sttonline.org/files/STT08_2_Harvey_EN.pdf). Last accessed Sept. 5, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Formally, Anselm defined God as "that than which no greater can be conceived." In Cartesian terms, existence is more perfect than non-existence; therefore the most perfect conceivable being must exist.

<sup>32</sup> Philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) refined Anselm's proof, and mathematicians Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716) and Kurt Gödel (1906–1978) offered their own ontological proofs. Eighteenth-century naturalist William Paley offered an a posteriori proof.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, first part, questions 1-11. Online: <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/aquinas/summa/FP.html#TOC02>. Last accessed Dec. 6, 2014.

<sup>34</sup> Baruch Medzibozer. Quoted in Louis I. Newman, *Hasidic Anthology* (New York: Schocken, 1963), 148. Medzibozer was the grandson of the famous Rabbi Baal Shem Tov.

<sup>35</sup> "Morning Prayer," *Book of Common Prayer*, 1662. The Athanasian Creed is named for Athanasius, Patriarch of Alexandria, but scholars believe that it probably dates from the late fifth or early sixth century—at least 100 years after Athanasius.

<sup>36</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Shorter Summa* (trans; Cyril Vollert; Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute, 1993), 14.

<sup>37</sup> Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis* (trans; R. Wilson; San Francisco: Harper, 1977/1984), 311.

<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of Gnostic teachings see John F. Nash, *Christianity: the One, the Many*, vol. 1 (Bloomington, IL: Xlibris, 2007), 260ff.

<sup>39</sup> The theoretical Kabbalah, a system of theology and ethics, contrasts with the ecstatic Kabbalah of mystics like Abulafia. See for example John F. Nash, "Abraham Abulafia and the Ecstatic Kabbalah," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Fall 2008), 51-64; "From the *Zohar* to Safed: Development of the Theoretical Kabbalah," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Summer 2009), 21-46.

<sup>40</sup> Asma al-Husna, "The Most Beautiful Names of Allah." Online: <http://sufism.org/foundations/ninety-nine-names/the-most-beautiful-names-of-allah-2>. Last accessed Sept. 5, 2015.

<sup>41</sup> John Scottus Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, vol. 3, 678c. Quoted in: "John Scottus Eriugena," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Online: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scottus-eriugena/>. Last accessed June 25, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> *Baghavat Gita* (trans.: Annie Besant & Bhagavan Das; Benares, India: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1905), §42, 191.

<sup>43</sup> John F. Nash, "Theosis: a Christian Perspective on Human Destiny," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2011), 15-33.

<sup>44</sup> See the discussion in Vladimir Kharlamiv, "Rhetorical Application of *Theosis* in Greek Patristic Literature," *Partakers of the Divine Nature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 121.

<sup>45</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, book I, ch. 16, §8.

<sup>46</sup> Baal Shem Tov, *Tzava'ath HaRivash*. Quoted in Aryeh Kaplan, *The Light Beyond* (New York, NY: Maznaim), 32.

<sup>47</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, section 125, 1882. The famous quote also appears in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* of 1891.

<sup>48</sup> *Deuteronomy* 6:5.

<sup>49</sup> *Jeremiah* 23:24.

<sup>50</sup> *Luke* 12:6-7.

<sup>51</sup> *Qur'an* 3:31, 34.

<sup>52</sup> Source: <http://catholicfire.blogspot.com/2011/08/ten-powerful-quotes-from-st-alphonsus.html>. Last accessed Dec. 2, 2014.

<sup>53</sup> Nachman Bratzlaver, *Likkutei Etzoth ha-Shamem*, 1913. Quoted in Newman, *Hasidic Anthology*, 138

- 54 Online:  
<http://www.eaglespace.com/spirit/gayatribywords.php>. Last accessed Feb. 24, 2015.
- 55 John F. Nash, "Prayer and Meditation in Christian Mysticism," *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Fall 2011), 17-41.
- 56 The Rosary, the ritual prayer to Mary the mother of Christ, is especially popular in Roman Catholicism. Recited with the aid of prayer beads, it includes five "Our Fathers" and fifty "Hail Marys." The Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me," is popular among mystics and others in the Eastern Orthodox Churches. Often it is repeated endlessly, until the words sink into the unconscious mind.
- 57 Kahlil Gibran, *Mirrors of the Soul* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1965), foreword.
- 58 John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul* (trans: E. A. Peers; Mineola, NY: Dover, 2003).
- 59 Theresa of Ávila, *Interior Castle* (trans. E. A. Peers; Mineola, NY: Dover, 1946/2007), 108.
- 60 *Psalms* 47:2.
- 61 John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (trans.: E. A. Peers; 3/e, Mineola, NY: Dover, 2008), 80.
- 62 *Ibid.*, 82.
- 63 *Isaiah* 64:4. See also *1 Corinthians* 2:9.
- 64 *Song of Solomon* 2:3.
- 65 Richard J. Hooper (ed.), *Hymns to the Beloved*, Sedona (AZ: Sanctuary Publications, 2010), 72.
- 66 Bernard of Clairvaux, Sermon 52, *Bernard of Clairvaux on the Song of Songs*, vol. 3 (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 1979), 50.
- 67 John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, 10.
- 68 Hooper (ed.), *Hymns to the Beloved*, 73.
- 69 *Ibid.*, 72.
- 70 T. Subba Row, *Esoteric Teachings*, Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1887/1951, 130.
- 71 The branch of Theosophy under William Q. Judge that broke away from the Adyar Society insists that the Logoi are to be understood more as forces: "So, simply put, the Logos is the all-ensouling Light and Life of the Universe. It is the *Living Universe* itself. It is the primal radiation from the Absolute at the dawn of the Maha-Manvantara or universal life cycle. It is Light, radiating forth from the Unknown Darkness of the Absolute. . . . It is the Anima Mundi or Universal Soul. It is Divine Ideation itself." Source: "Understanding the Logos." Online: <http://blavatskytheosophy.com/understanding-the-logos/>. Last accessed Sept. 8, 2015.
- 72 *Acts* 17:28.
- 73 Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Inner Life* (Chicago: Theosophical Press, 1911/1922), 140. The book is a compilation of lectures given at Adyar, India, prior to 1911.
- 74 Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* (New York: Lucis, 1925), 181.
- 75 Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Psychology I* (New York: Lucis, 1936), 335.
- 76 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 298. The same statement is repeated several times in Bailey's writings.
- 77 Alice A. Bailey, *Telepathy and the Etheric Vehicle* (New York: Lucis, 1950), 132.
- 78 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 298.
- 79 The choice of pronoun, in references to Logoi, is problematic. Terms like "Heavenly Men," in the esoteric literature of 100 years ago, can be attributed to prevailing cultural bias, but today such matters are taken more seriously. While gender as we know it is not relevant at the Logoi level, gender-like polarities may exist. One suggestion is that Logoi on the odd-number Rays be considered masculine, and those on even-numbered Rays feminine.
- 80 For a discussion of schemes, chains and globes see John F. Nash, *The Soul and Its Destiny* (Bloomington, IL: Authorhouse, 2004), 49-55.
- 81 Leadbeater, *The Inner Life*, 93. Although Leadbeater mentioned the Planetary Logoi as "force centers" in the body of the Solar Logos, his discussion of Logoi in this work and elsewhere focused almost exclusively on the Solar Logos.
- 82 Charles W. Leadbeater, *The Masters and the Path* (Adyar, India: Theosophical Publishing House, 1925). 265. Emphasis added.
- 83 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 255.
- 84 *Ibid.*
- 85 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 86 Alice A. Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (New York: Lucis, 1922), 150.
- 87 *Ibid.*, 162.
- 88 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 295. The name of the Cosmic Logos is normally capitalized in Bailey's writings.
- 89 Alice A. Bailey, *A Treatise on White Magic* (New York: Lucis, 1934), 274.

- 90 Ibid., 409.
- 91 Alice A. Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Lucis, 1951), 29.
- 92 Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 156.
- 93 Ibid., 182.
- 94 Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 98.
- 95 Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, 422-423.
- 96 Whether the disparity in distances has any impact on astrological interpretations is a topic that esoteric astrologers might wish to explore.
- 97 In organizational theory, hierarchies are categorized as “tall” or “flat,” according to the number of levels of responsibility. A tall hierarchy has many levels of responsibility. A flat hierarchy has relatively few levels, but many subordinate entities may report to each level.
- 98 Reportedly the Path of the Higher Evolution offers seven options, one being “The Path the Logos Himself is On.” Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 185-191. See also Alice A. Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* (New York: Lucis, 1957), 531.
- 99 Adam A. DeFranco shared that insight in a discussion on social media.
- 100 The term “Para-Brahman” is confusing. Sometimes it is used in eastern religion to emphasize the transcendence of the already transcendent Brahman. The term is often confused with “Para-Brahma,” referring to a deity lying beyond Brahma, the first “person” of the Hindu *trimurti*, or trinity.
- 101 *Bhagavad Gita*, 2,20 (trans: Swami Prabhavanada and Christopher Isherwood; New York: New American Library, 1972), 37.
- 102 For an in-depth study of the pneuma, nous and psyche among the Stoics and others, see Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians: The Divine Arche* (Aldershot, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate, 2007).
- 103 Nash, *Christianity: the One, the Many*, vol. 1, 188.
- 104 *1 Thessalonians* 5:23.
- 105 *Luke* 1:46-47.
- 106 Fourth Council of Constantinople, canon 11 and preamble. Online: [http://www.documenta catholicaomnia.eu/03d/0869-0869\\_Concilium Constantinopolitanum\\_IV\\_Documenta Omnia\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documenta catholicaomnia.eu/03d/0869-0869_Concilium_Constantinopolitanum_IV_Documenta_Omnia_EN.pdf). The council is not regarded as a major ecumenical council, and some historians claim that the outcome was distorted by voting irregularities. Nevertheless, the claim that we are nothing but body and soul was accepted as doctrine by western Christianity.
- 107 Ursula King, *Christian Mystics: Their Lives and Legacies throughout the Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: HiddenSpring, 2001), 109.
- 108 Meister Eckhart, Sermon 6, “The Greatness of the Human Person,” reproduced in Matthew Fox, *Passion for Creation* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1990), 103.
- 109 Theresa of Ávila, *Interior Castle* (trans. E. A. Peers; Mineola, NY: Dover, 1946/2007), 152.
- 110 William Law, *The Spirit of Prayer*, part I (London: Ogles, et al., 1816), 51.
- 111 Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After*, 1886.
- 112 Gottfried W. von Leibniz, *The Monadology* (trans.: Robert Latta), 1714, §3. Online: <http://home.datacomm.ch/kerquelen/monadology/monadology.html> Last accessed Sept. 10, 2015.
- 113 Ibid., §47.
- 114 Ibid., §63.
- 115 Subba Row, *Esoteric Teachings*, 129.
- 116 Ibid.
- 117 Sandra Hodson (ed.), *Light of the Sanctuary: the Occult Diary of Geoffrey Hodson* (Manila, Philippines: Theosophical Publishers, 1988), xiv.
- 118 Bailey, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, 158.
- 119 Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 86.
- 120 Ibid.
- 121 John F. Nash, “Theosis: A Christian Perspective on Human Destiny,” *The Esoteric Quarterly* (Spring 2011), 15-33.
- 122 Rudolf Steiner and Max Heindel insisted that Christ was a Sun spirit who had never incarnated in human form prior to his Palestinian mission.
- 123 Alice A. Bailey, *The Rays and the Initiations* (New York: Lucis, 1960), 722.
- 124 Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 18.
- 125 Ibid, 123-124.
- 126 *Nicene Creed*, as amended by the First Council of Constantinople, 381.
- 127 Ibid.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 Nancy E. Abrams, *A God that Could be Real* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2015), 53. Emphasis in original. Abrams’ book is reviewed elsewhere in this issue of *The Esoteric Quarterly*.
- 130 Ibid., 56. Emphasis in original.
- 131 Ibid., 61.
- 132 The terms *magisterium ordinarium* and *magisterium extraordinarium* were coined by the

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Church of Rome to describe its system of doctrinal authority, but they can also be used more generally. The former term refers to the ongoing, collective teachings of the bishops.

The latter refers to the occasional pronouncements on key issues of doctrine by councils of bishops or *ex-cathedra* papal pronouncements.

<sup>133</sup> John F. Nash, "The New World Religion: Opportunities and Challenges," *The Esoteric*

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*Quarterly* (Fall 2012), 17-38.

<sup>134</sup> Alice A. Bailey, *Letters on Occult Meditation*, (New York: Lucis, 1922), 157-158.

<sup>135</sup> Nash, *The Soul and Its Destiny*, 248-254.

<sup>136</sup> For comments on the mystic marriage and the emergence of the divine hermaphrodite, see Bailey, *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire*, 672.

<sup>137</sup> The author is indebted to a reviewer for this insight.