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THE INTERPRETATION OF KABBALAH IN EARLY 20TH-CENTURY RUSSIAN PHILOSOPHY Soloviev, Bulgakov, Florenskii, Losev

Konstantin Burmistrov

The Jewish mystical tradition has long attracted the attention of Christian thinkers. Their acquaintance with Kabbalah began as early as the 13th century, when the first kabbalistic texts were written down. It was then that a particular attitude towards Jewish mystical teachings began to be formed, one that in scholarship today is referred to as “Christian kabbalah.” Essentially, it was precisely because of this phenomenon that a meeting between European Christian culture and Jewish mysticism became possible. At the same time, one cannot really speak of the existence of a single tradition of Christian kabbalah—one should rather refer to a certain type of conception of Jewish mysticism in the Christian consciousness, one that took final shape during the era of the Renaissance.¹ Among the best-known students of Kabbalah one may mention, for example, Pico della Mirandola (1463–94), Egidio da Viterbo (1465–1532), Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) and Guillaume Postel (1510–81). Adepts of Christian kabbalah studied kabbalistic texts, translated and commented on them, and, with the aid of ideas found in the texts and exegetical devices, attempted to re-examine and reinterpret the text of the Bible and, as a result, found a new, more complete, basis for some Christian dogmas (such as the Incarnation, the Trinity, and Salvation). Among the most important ideas one should first of all mention the doctrine of the Ein Sof, the absolute First Cause, the names of God, the conception of the emanation of the sephirot (the 10 stages of emanation of the Divine light and, also, of the 10 Divine attributes). The methods of interpretation elaborated by the Christian kabbalists and the understanding of the Scriptures and Christian doctrine had significant influence on many European mystics and religious thinkers.²

At the same time, already in the 16th century, a special branch of Christian kabbalah began to develop, whose adepts combined kabbalistic ideas with alchemy, astrology and magical practices. This branch gradually diverged from the Jewish primary texts and those goals that the original Christian kabbalists set for themselves, and evolved in the direction of Masonic theosophy and the “occult kabbalism.” The occultists no longer considered Kabbalah to be an integral part of the Jewish tradition and detached it from its Jewish roots. Furthermore, they were little interested in Christian theological issues as well since, basically, they were creating a new quasi-scientific outlook.

The epoch of Christian kabbalah basically ended at the beginning of the 18th century and was followed by the rapid growth of occult kabbalistic theories, which eventually led to

the “occult renaissance” of the second half of the 19th century.³ At that time, interest in the Kabbalah among non-kabbalists began to be widespread, while interpretation of Kabbalah began to assume more fantastic and distorted forms.⁴

The main models of understanding Jewish mysticism that were elaborated by Christian kabbalists in the Renaissance significantly differed from each other, depending on which branch—classical or occult—a particular thinker inclined towards, and these models largely determined the subsequent reception of Kabbalah by European scholars, philosophers and religious thinkers.⁵ In our view, these models were also followed by Russian philosophers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries (although often it appears to be less a matter of historical continuity than of typological similarity).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many Russian thinkers and religious philosophers felt the necessity of becoming better acquainted with Judaism, its history and doctrines, of re-examining and re-evaluating the connection between Christianity and Judaism, as well as the role of the Jews in world history. Some of these intellectuals demonstrated a particular interest in Jewish mysticism, i.e. Kabbalah. As a rule, in this process they made use of various types of Western sources (works by Christian kabbalists, occult treatises and scientific studies), as they re-examined and reinterpreted the views of Kabbalah presented there. Some of them attempted to use specific kabbalistic ideas, as well as kabbalistic methods of interpreting the Scriptures in their own religious and philosophical systems, while others turned to Kabbalah in search of further arguments for anti-Semitic propaganda. Their positions were quite varied and sometimes diametrically opposite but, with its ambiguity, the familiarity with kabbalistic ideas had an indubitable impact on the intellectual profile of the epoch.

In recent years, interest in the reception of Kabbalah by Russian culture increased significantly. In fact, at the beginning of the 20th century there was in Russia an unprecedented interest in various “secret sciences”; this was the time of esoteric groups and circles, Masonic lodges and pseudo-Masonic organizations.⁶ However, the topic of the Russian “occult renaissance” has only an indirect relation to our question about the image of the Kabbalah that Russian philosophers of this time formed and its significance for their own philosophical systems. Although this topic did not yet become the subject of specific scientific analysis, scholars usually see in Kabbalah only one of the elements among a number of other “occult,” “esoteric” distractions of educated Russian society of the turn of the century. It is noted episodically by several writers who analysed Gnostic elements in the doctrine of certain philosophers.⁷ Only a single work presents a preliminary analysis of the kabbalistic sources that may have been used by the famous Russian philosopher Vladimir Soloviev (1853–1900).⁸ Recent articles by the American researcher Judith Kornblatt have attempted to analyse kabbalistic elements in Soloviev and some other Russian philosophers. Unfortunately, while presenting generalizations about material that is already known, she hardly dealt with the question of the specific sources that influenced the reception of Kabbalah by these thinkers.⁹ Furthermore, it would also be useful to make a complex analysis of the historical and cultural context in which various attitudes towards the Jewish mystical tradition were formed. It is obvious that not only specific sources and models of reception of Jewish mysticism but also a whole range of external, social factors (including ones related to the attitudes towards Jews in Russian society) affect the image of Kabbalah that was formed in Russian culture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Unfortunately, all of these things still remain in the category of the desired. The present article proposes only a number of preliminary observations about the kabbalistic interests of some Russian

philosophers, without in any way pretending to present a complete picture of this almost unstudied question.

Vladimir Soloviev

Since we have already had occasion to study Soloviev's familiarity with the kabbalistic tradition, we shall limit this analysis to a number of brief observations.¹⁰ It is generally believed that Soloviev was the first Russian philosopher to take a serious interest in Jewish mysticism. However, despite this widespread belief, one can hardly call him as serious a student of this mystical tradition as, for example, the Christian kabbalists of the 16th and 17th centuries. When looking at the early works of Soloviev, those of the second half of the 1870s (like *Sophia* or *Philosophical Principles of the Integral Knowledge*), it is evident that his interest in Kabbalah at this time was based on the paradigm of late Christian kabbalah, particularly its occult component. His sources, evidently, were the works of occultists, such as Eliphas Levi, H. P. Blavatsky and, possibly, some earlier Christian kabbalistic texts.¹¹ Soloviev did use some kabbalistic concepts, but he transformed them in a way that reveals a similarity, especially, to Masonic kabbalah of the late 18th century and points towards the tradition from which Soloviev derived his knowledge of Jewish mysticism.¹² It is clear from his treatise *Sophia*, and other works of the 1870s and the early 1880s, that during this period Soloviev was hardly interested in genuine Jewish Kabbalah. This was due less to his lack of ability to comprehend it than to his specific interests at the time. Like some Christian kabbalists before him, Soloviev saw Kabbalah as an occult, secret science that was transmitted to initiates since ancient times and had no direct connection to Judaism.

At the same time, it would not be correct to consider occult literature the only source of Soloviev's knowledge of Kabbalah. He was quite familiar with the European mystical literature of the 16th to 18th centuries, through Paracelsus, Boehme, Pordage, Swedenborg, and others. While the question of the role and Christian interpretation of Jewish mysticism in their writings is a complex one, scholars have observed profound similarity between the intuitions of some of these mystics and Jewish kabbalistic conceptions, although they do not seem to have had direct acquaintance with kabbalistic texts or with any kabbalists. This concerns especially the views of the outstanding German mystic Jacob Boehme, who, in the words of the greatest scholar of Jewish mysticism, Gershom Scholem, "more than any other Christian mystic, shows the closest affinity to Kabbalism precisely where he is most original. He has as it were discovered the world of Sefiroth all over again."¹³ Boehme's works were extremely important not only for Soloviev but also for Russian Masons of the late 18th and 19th centuries, and for Russian religious philosophers of the early 20th century (i.e. Sergei Bulgakov, Pavel Florenskii and Nikolai Berdyaev).¹⁴ It was precisely due to this similarity between Jewish mystical doctrines and the views of Christian visionaries and theosophists that the doctrines of theoretical Masonry and the new Rosicrucians emerged in the second half of the 18th century. The early Soloviev was close to these traditions in both his views and his sources.

As an illustration one might compare, however briefly, Soloviev's interpretation of two very important kabbalistic concepts—that of Ein Sof and Adam Kadmon—with the way in which they were understood by the Jewish Kabbalists and, subsequently, by the classical Christian kabbalah of the 15th to 17th centuries, as well as in texts of Russian Masonry of the late 18th century.

In Kabbalah, the term *Ein Sof* (Hebrew for "the infinite" or "unlimited") refers to the hidden, absolutely inaccessible Godhead. This most important mystical intuition can be

found in most kabbalistic texts. Ein Sof is absolute perfection, in which there are no distinctions or differentiations. Only through the very existence and the finite nature of the creation can one deduce the existence of Ein Sof as the primary cause of all.¹⁵ It is through His manifestation in Creation, through the emanation of the 10 sephirot, that God becomes perceptible to the gaze of the mystic. Thus, according to the Kabbalah, Ein Sof is the Absolute Reality to which it is impossible to assign any positive attributes; according to Scholem, it can be defined only as “the negation of all negation.”¹⁶

In Christian kabbalah, in particular that of Pico della Mirandola, Ein Sof is also viewed as inexpressible and as uniting all within itself. This is the hidden God, the *Deus absconditus*, whom Christian kabbalists understood in the same way as did the Jewish kabbalists.¹⁷ The idea is perfectly expressed by Reuchlin:

Ein Sof, Infinity [...] is unknowable and unutterable, hidden away in the furthest recesses of His divinity, into the unreachable abyss of the fountain of light, so that nothing is understood to come from him [...]. He is being and non-being—all that to our rational minds seems contrary and self-contradictory. He is like a being apart, untrammelled oneness, uncomplicatedly binding all together.¹⁸

Christian authors borrowed from the Kabbalah the doctrine of the emanation of the Divine Light from Ein Sof in the form of 10 sephirot, and they identified the three highest sephirot, Keter, Chokmah and Binah (Crown, Supernal Wisdom, and Understanding), with the three hypostases of the Trinity.¹⁹ Of course, nothing could be identified with the Ein Sof itself.²⁰

The Kabbalah played a major role in the teaching and ritual of a whole range of Masonic and quasi-Masonic secret societies of the 18th century, especially the German Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross, the French Order of Elus Coens (Chosen Priests), and the Order of Asiatic Brethren.²¹ In particular, Masonic literature spelled out in detail Masonic versions of kabbalistic cosmogony, recalling the works of earlier Christian kabbalists. Many manuscript texts by Russian Masons of the periods of Catherine II and Alexander I, which were concerned with kabbalistic doctrine, contained ideas about the Ein Sof as the source of the emanation of the sephirot.²² At the same time, the views expressed in them differed significantly from the understanding of Ein Sof in Jewish and Christian Kabbalah. The Masons identified the Ein Sof with the first sephirah, Keter, and then, following classical Christian kabbalah, in which Keter corresponded to God the Father, they, too, referred to Ein Sof as “the Father.”²³ In their view, within Ein Sof one can distinguish the prototypes of all things and an infinite quantity of inner powers that interact, constantly appearing and disappearing. For example, one of the most significant figures in the history of Russian masonry of the 18th century, Ivan P. Elagin (1725–93), referred to the Ein Sof as “the depths of Divinity” and “the Eternal Essence,” described its internal structure in detail and attributed to it many positive attributes.²⁴

In his *Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* (1877) Soloviev defined Ein Sof as the absolute primary cause of all that exists, God in His spiritual nature, the comprehensive source of all multiplicity. Ein Sof originally has the positive force of existence, and may be called “the positive nothingness.” Further in the same work, he speaks about three principles: Ein Sof, the Logos and the Holy Spirit. According to Soloviev:

[s]ince the Primary Element [i.e. Ein Sof] includes in Itself the potential second element [i.e. Logos] that It continually produces or generates from Itself as an eternal manifestation of Itself, it [Ein Sof] may be referred to as its eternal Father, in relation to which the second element or Logos is the eternal Son.

Soloviev proceeds to present the distinction between, on the one hand, the first and third elements (Ein Sof, and the Spirit or Sophia) and, on the other, the second element (Logos): "The most basic definitions or distinctions of the existence, of the essence, and of the being are presupposed by the Logos; they are not present in the Absolute itself, that is, in Ein Sof and in the Holy Spirit." Finally, Soloviev shifts to a clearly Christian terminology and makes the very existence of the Ein Sof conditional on the existence of the Logos, claiming that "the existence is Ein Sof determined by the Logos." Thus, Ein Sof is mediated by the Logos because "by its very nature It can not be without the Word that expresses It, and without the Spirit that affirms It [...]."²⁵ As we can see, the Ein Sof loses its abstractness in Soloviev's presentation. In fact, he simply identifies Ein Sof with God the Father, stating: "The first phase of the absolutely existent is the Ein Sof, or God the Father (the Primeval God)."²⁶ Similarly, in drafts for the treatise "Sophia" Soloviev treats the terms "Ein Sof" and "Father" as synonyms.²⁷

Thus, in his Christianizing interpretations Soloviev differs considerably from both Jewish and classical Christian kabbalah; at the same time, his approach is typologically similar to that of the branch of the latter that developed into Masonic kabbalah and late occultism.

Notably, Soloviev's treatment of the Ein Sof was severely criticized by another Russian philosopher, Sergei Bulgakov (1871–1944). According to Bulgakov, although he [Soloviev] defines the transcendental absolute using the kabbalistic term Ein-Sof, i.e. by means of negative (apophatical) theology, he then erroneously and without any explanation equates it with the first hypostasis. He deduced in a rational way, the relation of Ein Sof to the world, and therefore—their interdependence. Soloviev evidently confuses or at least insufficiently distinguishes the God as "No-Thing" of negative theology, and God at the initial stage of His manifestation in the world.²⁸

It is impossible to discover precisely which specific sources might have provided Soloviev with this understanding of the Ein Sof. He may have been influenced by some occult texts (e.g. the works of Eliphas Levi, who also associated the Ein Sof with the sephirah of Keter).²⁹ However, it makes most sense to speak of a typological similarity between their interpretative general principles underlying their explanations of kabbalistic materials.

Another Jewish mystical concept adopted by Soloviev (and, as shall be seen later, others as well) was the idea of Adam Kadmon.

In Kabbalah Adam Kadmon—the "Primordial" or "Heavenly Man"—is the highest and first form of the emanation of Ein Sof. However, sometimes this term denotes the totality of the emanation of the 10 sephirot. In the *Zohar* the heavenly person is the incarnation of all divine forms; it is "the mystic primordial image of the Godhead," embracing 10 sephirot and the prototype of man.³⁰ The terrestrial man is a reflection of the heavenly one and also of the whole Universe. In 16th-century Lurianic Kabbalah, Adam Kadmon is perceived as the light of the world, which first appeared out of Ein Sof, and is a kind of intermediary between Ein Sof and the world of the sephirot. It is just this form of divine manifestation that becomes accessible to the grasp of the mystic. According to the doctrine of Isaac Luria (1534–72), Ein Sof is totally inaccessible and cannot appear directly via the sephirot; only Adam Kadmon, a product of the self-limitation of Ein Sof, can appear in the form of the sephirot.³¹

During the 16th to 18th centuries, Adam Kadmon became one of the main concepts in Christian kabbalah and in European mysticism generally. Despite the variety of treatments of this idea in Christian literature, the most significant aspect is the identification of Adam Kadmon with the eternal Christ, in whose image the world and man are created. Many Christian mystics and kabbalists, starting with Pico della Mirandola, drew a parallel

between Adam Kadmon and Christ. With the appearance of the works of the learned Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1601–80), who considered the Jewish conception of Adam Kadmon to be analogous to the Christian doctrine of the eternal Jesus, this identification became a commonplace among European esotericists.³² Protestant pietists and millenarians of the 17th century assumed that, since all souls were originally contained in Jesus-Adam Kadmon, Christ is present in the souls of all people regardless of their religion, and universal salvation and universal brotherhood are possible.³³ This idea gained great popularity in the 18th century among Masons and Rosicrucians.³⁴

In the Masonic system, the doctrine of Adam Kadmon, the primordial human being, occupies a central position. A full exposition of the complex Masonic teaching on this figure is beyond the scope of the present study. What is of particular importance, however, is the fact that, unlike earlier writers on the subject, Russian Masons of the late 18th century made a clear distinction between the historical Jesus and Adam Kadmon as Primordial Christ, in whose image mankind was created. For example, in the works of Ivan Elagin this idea assumes an extreme form, where the role of the Saviour is ascribed to the Primordial Adam, with whom the Primordial Jesus is identified: the historical Jesus of Nazareth is referred to only as his “hieroglyph” or “effective representation,” not the real Saviour.³⁵

According to Soloviev, Sophia and Christ appear in the process of emanation or derivation from Ein Sof. However, Christ does not refer to the God-man Jesus Christ, but to Adam Kadmon, the Primordial Man. This is indicated in a draft of Soloviev’s *Sophia*, by a diagram in which he places the highest Trinity at the top, to whose second Trinitarian hypostasis he refers to by the names “Logos,” “Christ,” and “Adam Kadmon.” He places the historical Jesus beneath this Trinity, thus drawing a distinction between them in principle.

Repeating the ideas of the Masons and of Protestant mystics, Soloviev writes that Adam Kadmon, or “the soul of humanity, is the thinking centre and internal link of all beings.”³⁶ Like Elagin, he identifies Adam Kadmon with Christ-Logos whom he distinguishes from the historical Jesus. However, as in the case of the concept of Ein Sof, here, too, it is difficult to determine Soloviev’s specific sources. It is quite possible that he was influenced by Swedenborg’s idea of “the Grand Man,” in particular this concerns Soloviev’s concept of Godmanhood. Swedenborg’s doctrine, in turn, shows a close affinity to the kabbalistic concept of Adam Kadmon and its interpretations in Christian kabbalah of the 16th and 17th centuries.³⁷ Soloviev ranked Swedenborg as a great mystic and visionary, and pointed to the similarity between some of his ideas and the Kabbalah.³⁸ The Russian philosopher was also strongly inspired by the views of L. C. de Saint-Martin which have some kabbalistic associations. He was known to study the writings of other European mystics, occultists and natural philosophers, including Jacob Boehme, Paracelsus, Agrippa of Nettesheim, John Pordage, Eliphas Levi and Helena Blavatsky. All of them were to a greater or lesser degree inspired by the Kabbalah. This is especially true of Jacob Boehme.³⁹ Notwithstanding the striking affinity between the ideas of Boehme and some other esotericists and Jewish mystical doctrines, these Christian authors were unlikely to have been acquainted with the Jewish kabbalistic tradition. In any event, the similarity had an obvious influence on the teaching of Russian “theoretical” masons in the late 18th century, and—through them or independently of them—on Vladimir Soloviev and some other religious philosophers.

Among the more authentic sources of knowledge about the Jewish Kabbalah that were available to Soloviev and some other Russian thinkers was the famous anthology *Kabbala Denudata*, composed in Germany in the late 17th century. It contains translations of some important kabbalistic texts, including fragments of the *Zohar* and writings of Isaac

Luria and Moshe Cordovero. There is some evidence that Vladimir Soloviev was acquainted with this book.⁴⁰

Most of the materials that reveal Soloviev's interest in Jewish mysticism relate to the early period of his literary activity (the second half of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s). In the 1880s there was hardly any significant change in his attitude towards Kabbalah; he continued to study mystical and occult literature, subscribed to the journal *The Theosophist* (the official organ of the Theosophical Society) and was studying the multi-volume works of H. P. Blavatsky. Nevertheless, it is significant that, while he criticized the groundlessness of the theosophists' "neo-Buddhism," in his articles on Blavatsky Soloviev said nothing about the pseudo-kabbalistic basis of her doctrines, which was obvious to anyone who took the trouble to read her works.⁴¹ He also said nothing about the Kabbalah in his articles relating to Jews. As strange as it may seem, Soloviev's Jewish studies prevented him from becoming acquainted with genuine Jewish mysticism. This was because his guide in these studies (Faivel Gets) and other Jews of his acquaintance, as well as the books that he read about Jewish history and the Jewish religion, were all closely connected to traditions of the Jewish enlightenment (the Haskalah), which was hostile to all manifestations of mysticism.⁴² Of course, Soloviev was acquainted with the scholarly literature of his time in Biblical studies and Jewish history and tradition, but there is not a single reference in his writings to scholarly works about the Kabbalah. Evidently, he considered the kabbalistic tradition to be alien to the "real" Talmudic Judaism and, therefore, saw no need to refer to Kabbalah in his works relating to "the Jewish question."

There are grounds to assume that, after becoming acquainted, in the early 1890s, with Baron David Günzburg, an expert in the field of Jewish mysticism, and with the books about Kabbalah that the Baron recommended, Soloviev significantly broadened his knowledge in this area. This is particularly obvious in his article "Kabbalah" in the encyclopaedic dictionary published by the Brockhaus-Efron Publishing Company, where the history and doctrines of Kabbalah are presented adequately enough.⁴³ Although Soloviev referred to himself during this period as only "a dilettante in regard to Jewish mysticism," it was clear that he understood it far better than some of his followers.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, it is difficult to say to what degree Soloviev's newly acquired knowledge may have influenced his late views. In his works of that period there are no direct references to Jewish mysticism, while some of the ideas he elaborates (e.g. the concept of androgynism) have parallels in the kabbalistic tradition, but these are too general for any specific conclusion to be drawn on their basis.⁴⁵

Most scholars assert that Kabbalah exerted the greatest influence on Soloviev's concept of Sophia, the Wisdom of God, and on subsequent Russian Sophiology.⁴⁶ In particular, M. French assumed that Soloviev's views about Sophia and all of subsequent Russian Sophiology were based on the kabbalistic concept of *zimzum*, God's self-contraction, which preceded the creation of the world.⁴⁷ My opinion, however, is that, with its specifically Christian background, his concept of Sophia is primarily a reinterpretation of the views of some European mystics of the 16th to 18th centuries, including Jacob Boehme, John Pordage, Gottfried Arnold and Johann Georg Gichtel. Their writings enjoyed wide popularity in Russia from the late 18th century, when they were translated by the Masons. Besides, the description of Sophia in Soloviev's works *Sophia* (1875) and *La Russie et l'Eglise universelle* (1889) probably bears an imprint of Gnosticism, which had been a constant object of Soloviev's interest since his youth. At the same time, we can discern evident kabbalistic elements in Soloviev's cosmogony and in his interpretation of the divine hierarchy.

Many Russian thinkers of that time, for example V. V. Rozanov, L. A. Tikhomirov and A.F. Losev, were interested in Kabbalah. However, the two traditional attitudes towards Kabbalah were held by philosophers who considered themselves followers of Soloviev—S. N. Bulgakov and P. A. Florenskii (1882–1937). Florenskii took to its logical conclusion the occult approach to Kabbalah while, in his book *Svet Neverchernii* (The Non-Evening Light), Bulgakov surprisingly revived the classical doctrine of Christian kabbalah. Nevertheless, both of them took as their point of departure the foundation that Vladimir Soloviev had laid.

Sergei Bulgakov

One may say that Bulgakov, who studied Jewish mysticism seriously in the decade starting in 1910 (as reflected, most of all, in *Svet Nevechernyii*, and in his articles about Anna Schmidt), followed Soloviev's approach two decades earlier.⁴⁸ In his attempts to understand kabbalistic doctrine, Bulgakov consulted translations of traditional kabbalistic texts, *Sefer Yezirah* (The Book of Formation) and the *Zohar*. He had a very negative opinion of occult and theosophical interpretations of these texts, seeing them as a clear travesty of the Jewish kabbalah. As noted above, on more than one occasion, Bulgakov criticized Soloviev's understanding of the kabbalistic tradition, stressing, in particular, his rationalization of the concept of Ein Sof, and his incorrect identification of Ein Sof with the first hypostasis of the Trinity, God the Father.⁴⁹

Bulgakov was also familiar with many scholarly works about Kabbalah (in particular, the works of Adolf Franck, Erich Bischoff and August Wünsche); this gave him a basis from which to criticize those few Russian authors who endeavoured, at that time, to write something about Jewish mysticism (e. g. Professor M. Muretov).⁵⁰ At the same time, the knowledge that Bulgakov drew from the Jewish mystical tradition was significant beyond its contribution to the history of religions. He used kabbalistic ideas for elaborating his own theological system, in this sense following the classical Christian kabbalists of the 15th to 17th centuries. Thus, in his exposition of negative theology, Bulgakov considered in great detail the concept of Ein Sof, which he compared to the Christian apophatism, reaching the conclusion that had been reached earlier by Pico della Mirandola and Johannes Reuchlin, whereby "kabbalistic teaching about Ein Sof [...] brings Kabbalah close to Christianity, to which it [Kabbalah] approaches by its own essential teachings and aspirations."⁵¹

In elaborating his understanding of the creation of the world "in Sophia and via Sophia," Bulgakov spoke of creation not *ex nihilo* but from some kind of "Bogozemlia" (God-earth) that was "created outside of the six days of creation" and that absorbed into itself the "pleroma of Sophia." He directly referred to the source of this interpretation—as the *Zohar*.⁵²

No less significant for Bulgakov's understanding of the image of God in man is the teaching about the Heavenly Man, Adam Kadmon. According to Bulgakov, Adam Kadmon is the tree of the kabbalistic sephirot which contains the fullness of Divine energy. Bulgakov compares Adam Kadmon to the Heavenly Man Christ, thus showing clear parallels with Western Christian kabbalah. Also closely connected with this doctrine is Bulgakov's understanding of humanity as a single being. Every person is "part of the whole [...] he belongs to the corpus of the mystic human organism [...] of Adam Kadmon," and, after the incarnation "the Lord Jesus Christ is such a total organism." For Bulgakov, Adam Kadmon "is the sephirotic tree which contains in itself the complete fullness of Divine energies, or sephirot." Citing the *Zohar* a number of times and comparing kabbalistic doctrine with that of the New Testament, Bulgakov comes to the following conclusion: "The idea of the person as a microcosm, which

has been expressed many times in the philosophical and mystical literature of ancient and modern times, has nowhere received such a profound interpretation as in Kabbalah." Bulgakov constantly referred to the Kabbalah in his anthropology, in reference to the creation of the human being, the division into two sexes, the Fall, and the problem of marriage. He made frequent use of kabbalistic literature when discussing the significance of sex. Meditating on "the mystery of sex" and the mystical meaning of "the union of man and woman," Bulgakov noted that the ideas of Boehme and Kabbalah (which have so many things in common) differed significantly on this issue. Boehme's unambiguously negative attitude towards woman contrasts with "the feeling of profound reality and primordially," "the rightness of sex" in Kabbalah. Bulgakov was particularly attracted to the Zoharic idea of "the male-female nature of the human being" and also to that of the marriage of man with "two help-mates," a terrestrial wife and a heavenly spouse, the *Shekhinah*-Sophia or "Divine Glory" (*Slava Bozh'ya*). As Bulgakov wrote:

The spiritual and physical union of two in one flesh, as it is given in the norm of creation, is connected ... with the feeling of division, of sorrow ... [since] the Snake, with his impure seed, poisoned the ecstasy of the flesh [here Bulgakov is once again referring to the midrashic and kabbalistic understanding of the Fall as Eve's being seduced by the Evil Inclination]. However, the esoteric wisdom of Kabbalah links this ecstasy with an ascent to the heavenly world, with consorting with the *Shekhinah*.⁵³

In expounding his doctrine of Sophia, Bulgakov again avoids the rather confused identification by Soloviev of Sophia either with the second sephirah *Chokmah* (Wisdom) or with the tenth sephirah, *Malkhut* (Kingdom).⁵⁴ According to Bulgakov, Sophia is Divine Glory, the *Shekhinah* (the Divine Presence in the world). In describing the kabbalistic cosmology, he states that in its "originally expounded doctrine about the Sophia-ness (*Sofiynost'*) of the world [...] the Kabbalah essentially approaches Christianity, while at the same time explaining the Old Testament doctrine of Sophia."⁵⁵

In his profundity and the extent of his familiarity with kabbalistic doctrine Bulgakov clearly exceeds other Russian thinkers of his time. At the same time, it should be noted that, like many other writers who were interested in Kabbalah during that period, he was basically dependent on the six-volume French translation of the *Zohar*, which was made at the beginning of the 20th century by a baptized Galician Jew, Jean de Pauly.⁵⁶ In order to gauge the influence that this translation had on the reception of Kabbalah in Europe early in the century, one needs to consider the matter in greater detail. As a result of its appearance, for the first time educated Europeans had the opportunity to gain some familiarity with the main book of the Kabbalah in its entirety. And other Russian authors (such as N. Berdyaev and A. Losev), as well as Bulgakov, made use of this opportunity. However, the translation was marred by a number of features betraying its poor quality. According to Gershom Scholem, this "often utterly fantastic [i.e. unreliable] French translation" was "full of distortions and adulterations, and accompanied by a great many false textual references, often to books which do not contain them at all or to books which have never existed."⁵⁷ Furthermore, as Scholem noted, the translator was hardly acquainted with Kabbalah and this resulted not only in the inexactitude of his translation, but also in the impression that Kabbalah had left on the translation's readers. For example, the well known occultist of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Arthur E. Waite, the author of a number of books about Kabbalah (that became popular, including in Russia) relied totally on de Pauly's translation for his analysis of "the secret doctrine of Israel." As a result, as Scholem observed, Waite "read many things into

the *Zohar* that are simply not there.⁵⁸ It is very likely that Russian readers, lacking the ability and, often, also the desire to check the accuracy of the translation of kabbalistic texts, found in de Pauly's *Zohar* the most fantastic ideas. As we shall see below, this assumption is fully justified. Dependence on bad translations is the unfortunate lot of kabbalistic enthusiasts of our time in contrast to their predecessors, the Christian kabbalists of the Renaissance and Baroque periods. Bulgakov was remarkably free of such occult distortions of the Kabbalah as was prevalent in his times. In this respect he was unique, as the relationship to Jewish mysticism that he represented had died out by the 18th century.

Pavel Florenskii

We find quite a different attitude towards Jewish mysticism in Florenskii. One can understand the nature of his approach simply by analysing the sources he used and considered reliable. The works of Florenskii contain a sufficiently large number of references to "kabbalah" and "kabbalists." These appear first in his early works, beginning in 1904.⁵⁹ These references can be found in such works as *Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny* (The Pillar and Ground of the Truth), *Imena* (The Names), *Ikonostas* (Iconostasis) and *Vodorazdely mysli* (Watersheds of Thought), along with articles on the topic of *imyaslavie* (the glorification of the holy names).⁶⁰ He mentions concepts that were genuinely drawn from the Jewish Kabbalah, such as the doctrines of Ein Sof, the 10 sephirot, the primary point or, as Florenskii puts it, "the ontological center from which all develops." Of particular importance to Florenskii are the mystical nature of the Hebrew alphabet and the doctrine of the names of God.⁶¹

What were the sources of his knowledge about these matters? It is well known that Florenskii was extremely well read in occult, theosophical and other such literature, as well as in works about magic, demonology, astrology, etc. Long bibliographies of treatises and studies on these topics are cited, particularly in the notes to his *magnum opus*, *Stolp i utverzhdenie istiny*. Surprisingly, however, throughout his works one does not find a single reference either to any real kabbalistic work or even to any scholarly work about Jewish mysticism. While he undoubtedly was aware of the Jewish origin of kabbalistic doctrines, Florenskii drew his knowledge about them exclusively from occult sources and evidently shared the general occult attitude towards Jewish mysticism. Thus, his main source on speculative, theosophical kabbalah was the book *Kabbalah* by the famous occultist Papus (Gérard Encausse) probably the most important codifier of occult knowledge in the early 20th century (whose works remain extremely popular to the present day).⁶²

It was this work that Florenskii referred to when explaining what he described as the triune nature of human existence "according to the teaching of the Kabbalah."⁶³ Presenting occult interpretations as true "kabbalistic" teaching, Florenskii cited the Russian edition of Papus's book, while often providing incorrect references.⁶⁴ However, what is important is not his negligence in citing sources, but the sources to which he refers. Any reader who assumed that Florenskii was presenting genuinely ancient Jewish teachings that reached him via the learned occultist Papus would again have been mistaken. In fact, Florenskii was paraphrasing a lecture by the occultist Karl W. Leiningen-Billigheim, published by Papus, who referred to Leiningen as a "contemporary kabbalist." The lecture was delivered in 1887 to the Munich Psychological Society.⁶⁵ Leiningen-Billigheim's views, presented in an extremely illiterate Russian translation, were very far from true kabbalistic doctrines. Florenskii was quite familiar also with many other works by Papus and his disciples and often cited them. As for Papus's own knowledge of Jewish mysticism, he was a follower

of the rather long tradition of occult Kabbalah, and he based his ideas, first of all, on those of his teacher, J. A. Saint-Yves d'Alveydre (1842–1909), as well as works of Fabre d'Olivet (1767–1825), Lazare Lenain, E. Levi, Stanislas de Guaita (1861–97), and texts of the Masonic tradition. Gershom Scholem characterized Papus's knowledge of Kabbalah as "infinitesimal" and his books as "supreme charlatanism."⁶⁶

The sources of Florenskii's other "kabbalistic" constructs are not so obvious, although in all likelihood they too were similar texts of an occult nature. Thus, for example, when Florenskii was discussing differences between "Aryan" and "Semitic" types of thinking and perceptions of the world, he contrasted the "trinity of birth" of "Aryan theosophy" ("Father–Son–Spirit") with the "trinity of marriage" of "Semitic theosophy" ("Husband–Wife–Offspring"). Alluding to the mystic and ecstatic significance of circumcision and marriage, Florenskii claims that "in very late Judaism there is no concept at all of subject and object, but there is only the concept of husband and wife in gnoseology. And that is the whole Kabbalah."⁶⁷ Although it is not entirely clear what the philosophical concepts of "subject" and "object" might mean in any religious tradition, it should be noted that Florenskii's intuitions, and his interest in Jewish mysticism at that time (1916), revealed a clear similarity to those of V. V. Rozanov.

In his lectures *Smysl' idealizma* (The Meaning of Idealism), delivered at the Moscow Spiritual Academy, Florenskii referred several times and for different reasons to "kabbalah" and "kabbalists." In particular, he compared Adam Kadmon, via Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, to the Heavenly Person of Swedenborg (the parallels between the doctrines of the Swedish theosophist and Kabbalah have already been noted). Here Florenskii refers to what he terms the most important source of knowledge about Kabbalah, the six-volume De Pauly translation of the *Zohar*, with which he was most probably familiar.⁶⁸

Problems related to the nature of language and the status of names, the connection between word and reality, and the internal and external forms of the word were basic to Florenskii's philosophy of language. He attempted to interpret philosophically the ancient Christian doctrine of reverence for the Divine Name, which, during the *imyaslavie* disputes in the Russian Church in the second decade of the 20th century, called particularly for systematic philosophical expression. At that time, a group of monks in Mount Athos proposed their own interpretation of the doctrine of holy names and their glorification. From the outset this movement aroused the negative reaction of church officials. The monks were forcibly removed from Mount Athos to be scattered throughout the Russian Empire, and their doctrine was condemned. Along with some of Russian Orthodox philosophers and theologians, Pavel Florenski came out in support of the name-glorifiers (*imyavlavtsi*) and tried to elaborate a philosophical explanation of their ideas.⁶⁹

In his works on language and names, Florenskii also, on more than one occasion, referred to kabbalistic doctrine. For him, names, in general, represented some repository of energy that was organized in a hierarchical manner. In 1912, in a letter to V. A. Kozhevnikov, Florenskii refers to a person's name as a "logos spermatikos," the mystical centre of his or her personality, a *res realior*, full of positive energies, noting that "the theme of a personality is revealed by its name, all the rest is only a simple elaboration of this theme according to the rules of counterpoint and harmony."

Every word has a direct link with reality, with ideas that possess a "hypostatic existence." Florenskii refers to the "understanding of names as form-creating forces that actually, ontologically unite all of those who bear them" as "ecclesiastical and universal" and, indeed, this perspective is completely in accord with the doctrine of names in Kabbalah.⁷⁰ Florenskii

noted that Divine Names possess the highest level of energy, i.e. they are the most real. When a person pronounces the Divine name in prayer, he “necessarily enters into some kind of real relationship” with God; in other words, Florenskii believed that “pronouncing the Name of God is the living entry into the One Who Is Named.”⁷¹ Such a practice of “intellectual pondering-meditation” about the Holy Name has direct parallels in Jewish mysticism, in particular, in the school of prophetic (ecstatic) kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia (13th century).⁷² It may be noted that such an attitude to the [Divine] Name is characteristic also of Jewish mystics in general since, as Scholem states, all of God’s omnipotence is concentrated in His Name, the Name “represents the concentrated power of God himself, and this power is expressed in the Name.”⁷³ The one who contemplates the Name with inner sight communicates with the Divine itself.

When discussing the semantics of proper names in his work *Imena: Metafizika imen v istoricheskoi osveshchenii* (Names: the Metaphysics of Names in Historic Context), Florenskii resorts to kabbalistic or quasi-kabbalistic methods of deconstructing words, writing them down using the Hebrew alphabet and dividing them into separate letters and combinations of letters.⁷⁴ Attributing to these letters specific metaphysical features, he attempts to reveal the structure and internal dynamics characteristic of the names.⁷⁵ Using this method, Florenskii attempts, in particular, to explain the difference between Semitic and Aryan attitudes towards linguistic reality as such or, in his words, between the Jewish name (*shem*), related to “cognizable reality” and the Aryan name (*nomen*), that is connected to the “knower” and related to cognition. These two ways of knowing were seen by Florenskii as supplementing each other. He noted, in conclusion, that “for all peoples the name is not a mere label [...] not an arbitrary and random fabrication [...] but it is full of thought and reality, [it is] knowledge about the world that is manifested in the word.”⁷⁶

For Florenskii, the basic source for the kabbalistic deconstruction of words and names was the work of the famous French occultist and Mason, Antoine Fabre d’Olivet, who was quite popular both among Russian theosophists and occultists and in Symbolist circles. Primary among these works was d’Olivet’s *The Revived Hebrew Language*, in which he attempted to reconstruct the original meaning of humanity’s protolanguage.⁷⁷ He considered this to be one of the stages of the messianic process. D’Olivet attempted to discover the basic, original roots of the ancient Hebrew language. Moreover, in contrast to traditional Hebrew grammarians, he claimed that these roots were composed of two, not three, letters. Although modern scholarship does not share this view, it evidently stems from an ancient Jewish tradition connected with the *Sefer Yezirah*. As is generally known, this work describes the linguistic process of the creation of the world by means of the 10 numbers, or sephirot, and the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. According to this text, it is precisely by combining the 22 letters into two-letter pairs, that the material world was created. All the real beings in the three cosmic strata—the world, time and the human body—came into existence as a result of the interaction of the 22 letters or, more accurately, by the combination of letters in binary groups.⁷⁸ As Scholem noted, the idea of two-letter Hebrew roots was shared by a majority of the ancient writers of Hebrew hymns, who created synagogue poetry.⁷⁹ Following d’Olivet, and breaking names down into two-letter elements and then interpreting these, Florenskii was also following the ancient Jewish tradition of letter-mysticism.⁸⁰

The parallel with the *Sefer Yezirah* is even more apparent when one considers Florenskii’s “system of cognitive elements.” He constructed a paradigm of cognitive categories, the first of which is the idea, “the source of both existence and cognition.” From the idea

both number and name are derived; number is the form of external organization, the invariant of subjectivity. Furthermore, number is cosmologically what the idea is ontologically, while the name reflects the idea “pneumatologically.” Florenskii’s next paradigm was more complex (from each of the elements a pair of categories was derived, etc.). However, for us it is important to note that there exist, according to Florenskii, two supreme elements of the two worlds (the external and the internal) that are subordinate to the highest ontological element, the idea.⁸¹ A very similar paradigm can be found in *The Book of Formation*, which says that God created 10 primary numbers without attributes, and 22 foundational letters. The numbers are the four basic ur-elements (the first is the Spirit of the Living God) and six dimensions of the world, i.e. the world of space and time, the “external world.” All that fills this world is created by letters, all oppositions and laws defining its existence, as well as all created things—this is the “inner world.”

Thus, when speaking about kabbalistic linguistics and Kabbalah in general, Florenskii basically referred to occult sources although he did not admit this. For example, citing d’Olivet copiously, he declared a number of times that he was using the real methods and symbolism of Kabbalah. Of course, it would not be correct to consider Florenskii a follower of occultism as such: he often, and very harshly, criticized occult and theosophical ideas of his day, considering them to be channels of a refined and, therefore, a hundred times more dangerous, form of positivism and profanation.⁸² At the same time, having an undeniable interest in “the secret sciences” as such, he rather often borrowed from such sources specific ideas (which he believed to be ancient and authentic) and used them in his own constructions. This concerns Kabbalah in particular. Thus, V. Nikitin cites an excerpt from one of Florenskii’s letters, in which the philosopher explains the reasons for his negative attitude to contemporary occultism, which he calls “false occultism.” Florenskii writes that he believed that:

all theosophical journals, societies, and brochures are a profoundly negative phenomenon not because of their contents (which is a separate question), but because there is too much talking in those areas where silence is necessary. To make out of kabbalah, which used to be whispered by one person into another’s ear, and which was listened to with fear, to make this a topic for a satirical sketch read over morning tea or a report during a musical gathering with flirting women present—that is *so unesoteric* [...] And to the occultists by the grace of God, it is repulsive to see how the stinking mob pushes itself into the caves of mystery—and to smell the odour of the *garlic* that poisons the sweet smell of the most delicate incense.⁸³

As we see, for Florenskii “the occultists by the grace of God” did not approve of finding linking kabbalah “with the smell of garlic.” One must assume that this kind of kabbalah was insufficiently Aryan for them.

Furthermore, while Florenskii criticized contemporary occultists, he related with great respect and understanding to earlier European mystics like Boehme, Pordage, Swedenborg and Saint-Martin. He was also familiar with texts of the earlier occult (magical-alchemical) kabbalistic tradition, in particular, with the treatise *Gemma Magica*, by one of the outstanding members of the Rosicrucian movement of the early 17th century, Christoph Hirsch, and with other works of that kind, which were translated and published by Russian Masons in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.⁸⁴

Yet another aspect of Florenskii’s kabbalistic interests should be mentioned. He devoted particular attention to the so-called concept of the *kelippot*. Isaac Luria and his

school of Kabbalah believed in the concept of “the shells” or “husks” (*kelippot*, in Hebrew), which emerged after the cosmic catastrophe of the “breaking of the vessels” (*shvirat ha-kelim*, in Hebrew). These kabbalists identified the shells with the dark forces of Evil or the “Other Side” (*sitra ahra*, in Hebrew), which “imprisoned” the sparks of Divine light, whose liberation was to play an important role in universal Redemption.⁸⁵ Moreover, some kabbalists—especially those who belonged to the Lurian school—identified *kelippot* with gentiles. Thus, R. Hayyim Vital claimed that “the souls of *goyim* come from 3 *kelippot* ... of evil” (Etz Hayyim 49:3)⁸⁶, and, according to R. Sheftel Horowitz of Prague, “the souls of the people of Israel (*neshamot umma israelit*) are divine in their essence ... whereas the souls (*nefashot*) of the nations are from external forces of husks (*kelippot*)... and the souls (*neshamot*) of the people of Israel are emanated from holiness.”⁸⁷ R. Moshe Cordovero notes on this point, that “the pagans, even [if they perform] all the sins in the world, do not damage the realm of holiness at all, because they do not have a soul from the side of holiness, but from *kelippot*.”⁸⁸ In view of the zoharic idea of the “Fourth Captivity” of the Jews (after Egypt, Babylonia, and Persia or Greece; cf. Zohar 1:25a–b), the kabbalists told about the unceasing war the Jews waged against Amalekim (Christians?) inhabited the kingdom of Edom. According to Zohar, redemption will happen only after complete extermination of Amalekim. As Moshe Hallamish puts it

the mission of the Jewish people is to rectify the world, not the nations. It is the Jew’s responsibility to free the holy sparks imprisoned among the nations; bereft of their source of vitality, their existence would thereby be destroyed.⁸⁹

These kabbalistic ideas were known to Russian anti-Semitic authors who tried to use them in connection with ritual murder.

We find such an idea in the writings of such ideologues of Russian Antisemitism as I. E. Pranaitis, A. S. Shmakov, N. A. Butmi and T. I. Butkevich. In their view, the liberation of the sparks which was necessary in order to bring closer the advent of the Messiah was to be brought about by Jews murdering Christians not simply as homicide but in the form of ritual murder.⁹⁰ This idea played an essential role in the attempts to find a kabbalistic basis for the charge of ritual murder of Andriusha Yushchinsky in the Beilis case.⁹¹ There is an affinity between the obvious conceptual closeness of these anti-Semitic views and the ideas of Florenskii. Already in his *Stolp i utverzhdienie istiny*, he mentions some “shells” that correspond to the occult “spiritists’ spirits” (in regard to which he cites Blavatsky). A curious observation about shells is found also in his *Vodorazdeli mysli*, as well as *Ikonostas*, where he identifies the *kelippot* with “astral corpses and demonic ‘larvae’.”⁹² It seems that Florenskii’s attitude to these matters is that of a non-judgmental, objective researcher. A subjective element is present, however, in a 1913 letter from Florenskii to Rozanov. Florenskii criticizes his addressee for too “simplistic” an understanding of the pernicious plans of the Jews, and claims that “those” Jews are presenting certain “vile things” and *klipoty* “as lures for Christians who have already submitted to positivism.” In summary, for Florenskii these *kelippot* (which he uses in the Russian plural form *klipoty*) are the evil forces by which Jews corrupt Christians. Rozanov, however, believes that the Jews employ the term *kelippot* to refer to “idol worshippers,” i.e. the Christians, whom it is necessary “to eliminate from the world.” Both Florenskii and Rozanov believed in the “kabbalistic” motives for ritual murder, as is clear in other letters between them.⁹³

Florenskii’s manifest mystical anti-Judaism was expressed in a preface he penned anonymously for the collection *Izrail’ v proshlom, nastoiashchem i budushchem* (Israel in the

Past, Present and Future), in which he discusses the “Jewish origin” of “satanic and luciferian cults” that were “the basis for Masonry.”⁹⁴

To summarize, in his attitude towards Jewish mysticism, Florenskii represented a classic example of the occult approach that had its roots in Agrippa of Nettesheim (1486–1535) and Paracelsus. For Florenskii, Kabbalah was a type of secret knowledge, transmitted by initiates, which hardly had any connection to real Jews. At the same time, Florenskii was clearly influenced by anti-Semitic interpretations of Kabbalah that emerged in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Alexei Losev

Although we have relatively little evidence of Alexei Losev’s (1893–1988) interest in Jewish mysticism, from his works of the late 1920s and early 1930s it is clear that he was acquainted with some kabbalistic ideas and translations of kabbalistic texts. In all probability, Losev was not inclined towards occult interpretations of kabbalistic ideas. For him, Kabbalah was rather a part of Jewish tradition. At the same time, in contrast to Bulgakov, Losev was interested in the Kabbalah primarily in connection with the mysticism of the Hebrew language and its doctrine of Names. In contrast to Florenskii, he used more authentic sources. In particular, in the fourth chapter of his book *Veshch’ i imia* (Thing and Name), written in the late 1920s, Losev speaks about the role of Divine names in the Old and New Testaments, in the context of Jewish tradition, primarily the Kabbalah.⁹⁵ Losev wrote:

The teaching of Kabbalah about the Divine alphabet and Divine names is, perhaps, the most developed system of onomatology that has ever existed in the history of religion.... In Kabbalah, the doctrine of names is presented perhaps more clearly than in any other system of human mysticism.

He twice refers to his intention to write a separate work setting out “the teaching of Kabbalah about names,” but he limits himself to citing extensively from the French translation of the *Zohar*, accompanying these citations with short commentary. These excerpts present the doctrines of Ein Sof, the [Divine] Name and other names, and the creation of the world by means of the Divine alphabet.⁹⁶

Losev used the same *Zohar* translation as Bulgakov and Florenskii. His library contained the six-volume edition of De Pauly’s French version. However, in *Veshch’ i imia* he cites the one-volume abridged version that appeared in 1926.⁹⁷ It is known that in the second half of the 1920s, Losev studied classical Hebrew (with Bishop Varfolomei Remov), although this was most likely prompted by his desire to understand the German Hebraists he was quoting. As in the case of Soloviev, familiarity with the fundamentals of classical Hebrew could hardly have influenced his kabbalistic studies. In any case, the selection of fragments from the *Zohar*, and their translation into Russian from French were made for him by his wife, Valentina M. Loseva.⁹⁸ Of greater importance here were probably his consultations with the philosopher Boris G. Stolpner (1871–1967), who was one of the authors of the pre-revolutionary *Evreiskaia entsiklopediia* (Jewish Encyclopaedia) and a regular participant in the discussions that took place among the Jewish intelligentsia at the beginning of the second decade of the 20th century (his dispute with Shimon Dubnow about the nature of Hasidism and Kabbalah is well known).⁹⁹

It is difficult to say just what kind of influence on Losev was extended by Stolpner, a former friend of Rozanov, who compiled Marxist anthologies in the 1920s on the history of

philosophy.¹⁰⁰ According to A. A. Takho-Godi, Losev and Stolpner engaged in long discussions, especially “about the influence of neo-Platonism on Kabbalah.” Takho-Godi claimed that it was Stolpner who gave Losev “the French translation of Kabbalah.”¹⁰¹ An analysis of the unique understanding of Kabbalah by Stolpner, “a product of the rabbinical yeshivas,” who subsequently, during his wanderings in Switzerland and Germany, mastered “the teaching of Marx,” may help us understand the origin of Losev’s notion of the Kabbalah, formed in the second half of the 1920s.¹⁰²

Unfortunately, Losev did not fulfil his aspiration of writing a separate work about the Kabbalah. He did, however, return to Jewish mysticism in his treatise *Samoe samo* (the Absolute), written in the early 1930s, after his release from imprisonment in a Soviet labour camp. Since Losev’s views are quite remarkable, we shall cite some particularly significant excerpts from his work.

In concluding a “short overview of doctrines about the Absolute,” Losev proposes consideration of the following:

yet one more monument of world thought that has been rather poorly studied, particularly from the perspective that interests us, and this is Kabbalah, especially the *Book of the Zohar* [...]. The *Book of the Zohar* contains a number of texts about the so-called Ein Sof, the No-thing. This is the, already familiar to us, absolute unity, for which not a single attribute can in any way be predicated. It is invisible, unimaginable, and unknowable, etc., etc. However, here there is not only a general formal apophatism.... One has to judge the nature of every transcendental element according to those categories and things that are manifestations and emanations of it. And in this regard, the *Zohar* offers very interesting material.

The first and basic manifestation of Ein Sof is the primary human being, Adam Kadmon. Through him [i.e. Adam Kadmon] there emanate ten sephirot, which are divided into three triads, plus the culminating sephirah. The first triad is Crown, Wisdom, and Intelligence; the second—Beauty, Mercy, and Justice; and the third—Foundation, Victory, and Glory. The tenth sephira combines and synthesizes the previous nine sephirot and is called Kingdom. This Kingdom, the kabbalistic “Malkhut,” is the first adequate expression of Ein Sof; it is what Adam Kadmon produces by his nine sephirot.

On the basis of these teachings of Kabbalah (we shall not mention here other, more fascinating doctrines) one can, with complete confidence, state that Ein Sof has its true originality as the *absolutization of social, impersonal-social* existence... Transcendence here is the apotheosis of *social impersonality*, the absoluteness of *humanity*, taken in the sense of the impersonal condition. Also the very term “Ein Sof,” “the No-thing,” suggests a certain active nihilism in regard to personality, at the same time as other apophatics speak simply about Nothing or, for example, like Nicholas of Cusa, about “Non aliud” (the Non-otherness). Cusa’s “Non aliud” specifically wishes to save and affirm individuality, while the No-thing of Kabbalah wants to destroy it.¹⁰³

Losev confuses the order of the emanations of the *sephirot* and transcribes their names in Russian incorrectly, but what is especially revealing is his interpretation of the concept of Ein Sof. While for Bulgakov, this was the concept that brought Kabbalah and Christianity most closely together, for Losev, on the contrary, it represented the greatest distance between them. For him, Kabbalah was a teaching that proclaimed a militant anti-individualism or “active nihilism.”

This view of the Jewish Kabbalah as attempting to destroy individuality fits with the image of Kabbalah that Losev already depicted in his 1929 *Dialektika mifa* (The Dialectics of Myth). Referring to a certain “learned Jew, who was quite familiar with kabbalistic and Talmudic literature,” most likely Stolpner, Losev conveyed the idea that:

the essence of all Kabbalah [...] does not at all consist in pantheism, as liberal scholars think, who compare the doctrine of Ein Sof and the Sephirot with neo-Platonism, but rather with *pan-Israelitism*: the kabbalistic God *needs* Israel for His own salvation, He was *incarnated* in Israel and *became* it. Therefore the myth of world domination of a deified Israel, which is forever contained in God, is so necessary dialectically... just as it is necessary for Christ to be the God-man hypostasis.¹⁰⁴

This understanding of the essence of Kabbalah is similar to the statement “this is the confession of world Jewry as the absolute representation of existence.”¹⁰⁵ Since Losev discussed this allegedly Jewish concept as one of several “relative mythologies,” the immediate context of his statement and the nature of his language suggest that this was the image of Kabbalah available to him, which he believed necessary to present in his books. This image, undoubtedly, is a negative one. According to Losev, “kabbalistic god” is not the Absolute Being but it still needs to be solved with the help of the “chosen people.” Moreover, this “god” is “incarnated” in the Jews and “becomes” them. It is not difficult to make out in this description not the Jewish God, and even not the Jewish Satan but the Christian Devil whose association with the Jews has a long tradition traced back to the Middle Ages.¹⁰⁶

One cannot help recalling at this point a recently published document, which purports to be a *spravka* (information) prepared for the INFO OGPU (the information division of the Soviet secret police, known by these initials), which is a *referat* (official review) of Losev’s *Dopolneniya k Dialektike mifa* (Addenda to “The Dialectics of Myth”).¹⁰⁷ The appearance of this *referat* led to heated polemics in the press both in Russia and abroad.¹⁰⁸ It is obvious that one can hardly consider this product of the Soviet penal system to be an authentic exposition of the views of Losev. However, in terms of its portrayal of the “kabbalistic relativistic mythology,” parallels with Losev’s authentic works come to mind. This *referat* contains a similar view of the Kabbalah as a supernatural force directed against everything that is “individual” (i.e. Christian) and leads the world to a state of complete “impersonality” and “anti-Christian” collectivity. This text attributes the following statement to Losev:

Kabbalah is a principle of human nature actively directed against the element of grace [...] Kabbalah is the deification and absolutization of Israel [the Jewish people]. Israel is the principle of defection from Christianity and the bulwark of all the world’s anger against Christ.

From this it is not far to the next thesis ascribed to Losev (which totally coincides with the statement of Florenskii in his *Izrail’ v ego proshlom, nastoiashchem i budushchem*):

The Jews are the historical carrier of the spirit of Satan [...]. With all their dialectical and historical consequences the Jews represent Satanism, the bulwark of world Satanism [...]. The Jew is not at all anti-moral. He is amoral. Therefore, the Jew does not fear demons.¹⁰⁹

It is obvious that one is dealing here with the old myth of “diabolic kabbalah,” which was expressed in many anti-Semitic works of the 19th and 20th centuries. At the same time, the following aspect should be taken into consideration: even if the published documents from archives really were penned by Losev, and even if they were not radically distorted during their “treatment” by the state organs, these fragments of Losev’s texts were extracted

from that part of *Dopolneniya k 'Dialektike mifa'* in which the philosopher dialectically compares the ways in which different types of worldviews evaluate each other. This explains the denunciatory and, sometimes, even vulgar style of presentation. In *Dialektika mifa*, the author presents different "relative mythologies" and confronts them with each other in order to show their "relativity." Thus, not only Judaism is shown in an unfavourable light but also Christianity. It is precisely for this reason that we are inclined to speak about the image of Kabbalah in Losev's work rather than his personal attitude towards it. His personal position may, however, be surmised from his references to still "absolute" mythology. Thus, in excerpts published from the undoubtedly genuine Losev text, *Dopolneniya k 'Dialektike mifa'*, one finds the following: "Judaism [...] insists on the point of view that the Absolute needs the Jewish people for its implementation and completeness."¹¹⁰ Based on his understanding of "Judaism," Losev concludes that the Jewish "god" is incomplete, imperfect, and "in need" of something external to itself in order to be "fulfilled," i.e. "saved."

Losev also refers to Jewish mysticism in his late works, written in the 1970s and 1980s. There Kabbalah assumes a less demonized or "mythologized" character, although, from a scientific point of view, his views and evaluations appear quite debatable. He expresses one such questionable view, when in *Estitika Vozrozhdeniia* (Aesthetics of the Renaissance) he refers to Johannes Reuchlin as "an advocate [...] for the recognition of the huge importance of those numerous Jewish medieval treatises, which were codified in the twelfth and thirteenth-centuries into one huge work entitled Kabbalah."¹¹¹ It is well known that the first kabbalistic texts were written down in the early 13th century, although they may have reflected earlier oral tradition or personal mystical experience. In any case, they were in no way "codifications" of "numerous medieval treatises."¹¹² It is equally clear that the idea of a supposedly unified and single book titled *Kabbalah* can only be relegated to the realm of myth, not scholarship.

The following view expressed by Losev is also doubtful although it has often been expressed by others as well: "Kabbalah expresses nothing more than neo-Platonic doctrine that is used for the purpose of interpreting the Bible."¹¹³ Despite the fact that, according to his own definition, to speak of the neo-Platonic roots of Kabbalah is "a vile habit of a European outsider," Losev persistently repeats this idea also in his book *Vladimir Soloviev i ego vremia* (Vladimir Soloviev and his time).¹¹⁴ In asserting that Kabbalah "is the most real neo-Platonism, albeit not an ancient one, but a medieval Jewish one," he distinguishes Soloviev's doctrine from the Kabbalah.¹¹⁵ In the process, he claims the existence of many "points at which there is complete opposition between Soloviev's philosophy and medieval Kabbalah." However, he provides no examples, referring to his lack of knowledge of Hebrew.

A great deal has been written about the inappropriateness of viewing the Kabbalah, as a variety of neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, or any other doctrine extraneous to Judaism.¹¹⁶ When discussing neo-Platonism in Christianity (e.g. in regard to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite), Losev did not claim that neo-Platonism was the very basis of his philosophy, or that his Christianity "was neo-Platonism," as he did in regard to Jewish mysticism. Furthermore, it should be noted that a century ago Soloviev himself rejected such a mistaken view of the Kabbalah. In an introduction to David Günzburg's article *Kabbalah, misticheskaia filosofii evreev* (Kabbalah, the mystical philosophy of the Jews), he wrote:

Kabbalistic theosophy is not the system of a single thinker or separate school but a unique world-view which was formed over centuries. Although this gigantic tree is over

one thousand years old, until recent times it produced, although not always healthy, branches. Its roots are hidden in the dark depths of Jewish and Jewish-Chaldean religious thought, while through those of branches that are perceptible to the historical outlook, it is intertwined with Gnostic and neo-Platonic speculations. But to pay attention only to these superficial branches, and to see in Kabbalah no more than a variant of neo-Platonism, would be almost as great an error as if one were to deduce the medieval origin of kabbalistic doctrine from late versions of kabbalistic books of the thirteenth and fourteenth-centuries. In fact, Kabbalah is a product neither of the Middle Ages nor of Alexandrian thinking.¹¹⁷

Soloviev distinguished the ancient Jewish Kabbalah from both Greek philosophy and neo-Platonism. The main difference between them being the complete absence from Kabbalah of any dualism (which is characteristic of the other two philosophies), since the kabbalistic world process is understood as the process of manifestation of the Absolute, and not in any way a fall or a degeneration. This manifestation or revelation of the Absolute is the completion of full existence. Moreover, Soloviev perceived the idea of the individual as a unique, absolute, and an all-encompassing form of the universe as a type of consciousness that was completely alien to the Greeks. He asserted that this idea was:

a genuinely Biblical truth that was transmitted to the Christian world by the Apostle Paul [...]. The real and mystical link of all that exists, as a manifestation of the single absolute entity, this is the point of departure or the basic principle of Kabbalah; conscious and systematic anthropomorphism—is its culmination.¹¹⁸

Thus, in Soloviev and Losev, one can see two completely different types of understanding of kabbalistic doctrine.

Conclusion

This study presents only preliminary observations on the attitudes of some early 20th-century Russian philosophers towards Jewish mysticism. However, even from such a brief survey, it is clear that, regardless of the difference between their respective approaches, their range would be even broader if we included works by Vassily Rozanov, Lev Tikhomirov, Nikolai Berdyaev and Nikolai Lossky, as well as Russian mystics and occult thinkers of the early 20th century. A number of well-defined tendencies emerged. The Kabbalah was understood as a Jewish mystical tradition, an attempt by Jewish mystics to know the Godhead, as a collection of magical practices, or as some evil (“anti-Christian”) force directing the course of world history (or a strategy of these evil forces). These differing views about the Kabbalah determined the selection of sources cited, as well as their interpretation and implementation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that from such an inadequate image of Kabbalah, one should not draw hasty conclusions about the anti-Semitism of any one of the thinkers reviewed. Rather, one should attempt to understand their attitudes towards Kabbalah (which cannot be identified with their attitude towards either Jews or Judaism) by considering their religious and philosophical views in their entirety, with due consideration given to the originality and *Weltanschauung* of each one of them. This is particularly important for evaluating Rozanov and Losev. The role of Kabbalah, like that of “the Jew” in their personal mythologies, requires further clarification. Moreover, not enough attention has been paid to the context in which these philosophers acquired their acquaintance with Kabbalah. This

relates especially to the “kabbalistic studies” of a number of teachers at religious seminaries of the time, as well as to the interest in Kabbalah among members of the contemporary Jewish intelligentsia and of Russian occultists etc. However, already at this stage of research, it is apparent that the encounter with Kabbalah had a significant impact on the intellectual climate of the epoch and that this has allowed us to re-examine some aspects of the history of religious, philosophical and mystical trends in Russia of the early 20th century.

NOTES

1. Scholem, “Zur Geschichte der Anfänge der Christlichen Kabbala,” 158–93; Dan, “The Kabbalah of Johannes Reuchlin,” 55–96.
2. On the Christian Kabbalah see: Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*; Secret, *Les Kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*; Scholem, *Die Erforschung der Kabbala von Reuchlin bis zur Gegenwart*; Faivre and Tristan, *Kabbalistes Chrétiens*; Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandella’s Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*; Hames, *The Art of Conversion*; Burmistrov, “Christian Kabbalah and Perception of Jewish Mysticism.”
3. See Hanegraaff, “Jewish Influences V,” 644–47. Cf.: “...occultist ideas about ‘kabbalah’ reflect no familiarity with Jewish sources but are entirely dependent on second-hand materials passed on via Christian kabbalistic channels” (ibid., 644).
4. See: ibid.; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 202–03; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 2. Cf.: Burmistrov, “Gershom Scholem und das Okkulte.”
5. Theoretically, one can distinguish at least a dozen approaches to Kabbalah within the so-called Christian kabbalah. They differ from each other in their aims, in the principles of selection of kabbalistic texts, and so on. See for more details: Burmistrov, “The Christian Kabbalah: An Attempt at Typological Analysis,” 180–96.
6. See: Serkov, *The History of Russian Masonry*, 67–126; Bogomolov, *Russian Literature of the Early XX Century and Occultism*; Fedjuschin, *Russlands Sehnsucht nach Spiritualität*; Carlson, *No Religion Higher Than Truth*; Carlson, “Fashionable Occultism,” 135–52.
7. See, for example, Kozirev, “Paradoxes of an Unfinished Treatise”; Kozirev, “The Meaning of Love in V. Soloviev’s Philosophy and Some Gnostic Parallels”; Kozirev, “Vladimir Soloviev and Anna Schmidt Expecting The Third Testament,” 23–41; Carlson, “Gnostic Elements in the Cosmogony of Vladimir Soloviev,” 49–67.
8. This topic is extensively discussed in: Burmistrov, “Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah,” 7–104. There is also a detailed bibliography.
9. See: Kornblatt, “Solov’ev’s Androgynous Sophia and the Jewish Kabbalah”; Kornblatt, “Russian Religious Thought and the Jewish Kabbala.”
10. See: Burmistrov, “Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah.”
11. On Soloviev’s interest in Eliphas Levi see: Lukyanov, *On V. S. Soloviev in His Youth*, 172, 247; Burmistrov, “Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah,” 64–67. Soloviev was probably familiar with the famous anthology *Kabbala Denudata* (Sulzbach, 1677–78—Frankfurt am Main, 1684) collected and edited by C. Knorr von Rosenroth. According to Paul Allen, while in London, Soloviev studied not only *Kabbala Denudata*, but also Solomon Trismosin’s alchemical treatise “*Splendor Solis*” (1582). Unfortunately, Allen does not provide evidence to substantiate this information. See Allen, *Vladimir Soloviev*, 100.
12. Parallels between the interpretations of some kabbalistic doctrines by the Russian Masons of the late 18th and early 19th centuries and by V. Soloviev are examined in: Burmistrov, “Vladimir Soloviev and Russian Freemasonry.” See also on the interest in Kabbalah in

- Russian Masonry: Burmistrov and Endel, "Kabbalah in Russian Masonry"; Burmistrov and Endel, "The Place of Kabbalah in the Doctrine of Russian Masons."
13. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 233. On the putative kabbalistic influences on Jacob Boehme's views see: Schulze, "Jacob Boehme und die Kabbala"; Huber, *Die Kabbala als Quelle zum Gottesbegriff Jakob Boehmes*; Edel, *Die individuelle Substanz bei Boehme und Leibniz*; Schulitz, *Jakob Boehme und die Kabbalah*.
 14. See: Burmistrov, "Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah," 45–63; David, "The Influence of Jacob Boehme on Russian Religious Thought."
 15. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 89. On the different interpretations of Ein Sof in kabbalistic tradition, see *ibid.*, 88–96; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 103.
 16. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 38.
 17. At the same time, the Christian apophatic tradition of "negative theology" also left a mark on their interpretations of Kabbalah. Thus, Johann Reuchlin referred to Nicholas of Cusa when discussing the inscrutability of Ein Sof, and Flavius Mithridates—Pico's mentor in Kabbalah—combined the apophatic formulae of R. Azriel of Gerona with those of the Christian neoplatonist Johannes Scotus Eriugena. See: Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, 100–05.
 18. Reuchlin, *On the Art of the Kabbalah*, 121. Cf.: Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 440.
 19. See, for example, Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century*, 125–26.
 20. On the interpretation of Ein Sof in Christian Esotericism and Kabbalah, see also Schulitz, *Jakob Boehme und die Kabbalah*, 74–82; Häussermann, "Theologia Emblematica"; Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, 235–38.
 21. On the place of Kabbalah in the doctrine of the latter, see: Katz, *Jews and Freemasons in Europe*, 26–53; Scholem, "Ein verschollener jüdischer Mystiker der Aufklärungszeit," 247–78; Burmistrov, "Kabbalah in the Teaching of the Order of Asiatic Brethren"; McIntosh, *The Rose Cross and the Age of Reason*, 161–77 (cf. also pp. 73–76, on kabbalistic elements in the doctrine of the Gold und Rosenkreuz system).
 22. It should be noted that only a small proportion of the extant Masonic manuscripts are related to Kabbalah—no more than five to seven per cent. Some of them are probably unique. For details see: Burmistrov and Endel, "Kabbalah in Russian Masonry," 24–30.
 23. See, for example, Division of Manuscripts of the Russian State Library [DMS RSL], F 14, N 1116, pp. 7–8.
 24. Russian State Archives of Ancient Acts [RSAAA], F8, N216, PT 6, F61V-62V. For Ivan Elagin's Kabbalistic studies see: Burmistrov and Endel, "The Place of Kabbalah in the Doctrine of Russian Freemasons," 48–53. For more on Ivan Elagin's interpretation of Ein Sof see Burmistrov, "Christian Orthodoxy and Jewish Kabbalah."
 25. Soloviev, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 320; 329; 330; 331.
 26. Soloviev, *Collected Works*, vol. 3, 88 (cf. also p. 95); 347.
 27. Soloviev, *Vladimir Soloviev*, 130.
 28. Bulgakov, *The Non-Evening Light*, 129–30.
 29. See: Lévi, *Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, 109; 98–101. Soloviev was well acquainted with the works of this renowned French occultist. An appreciation not only of Kabbalah but also of the Talmud and rabbinical Judaism was typical of both of them. See also Burmistrov, "Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah," 64–67.
 30. See Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 60 (see also pp. 46, 229–32).
 31. On Adam Kadmon, see Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 104, 112–15, 128; and Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 137–40.

32. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 200. See also: Häussermann, "Theologia Emblematica," 304–16.
33. Some of these concepts are analysed in Coudert, *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century*, 120–32 (as well as in certain works to which Coudert refers); Burmistrov, "Kabbala Denuadata Rediscovered"; Burmistrov, "Christian Kabbalah and Jewish Universalism," 52–78.
34. See, for example, the Russian translation of L. C. de Saint-Martin's *Des Erreurs et de la Vérité: O zabluzhdeniiah i istine*, 1785, 35, 70–71, as well as interpretations of the idea of Adam Kadmon in Russian Masonic manuscripts of the 1780s: "A Short Notion on Kabbalah," DMS RSL, F. 14, N 992, ff. 3–4, 8, 14–15; "On Ten Sephirot," DMS RSL, F. 14, N 1116, pp. 23–24. On Adam Kadmon in Russian Romantic literature inspired by Masonic ideology, see Baehr, "The Masonic Component in Eighteenth-Century Russian Literature," 121–39; Baehr, *The Paradise Myth in 18th Century Russia*, 107–09; Schneider, *Quest for Mysteries*, 103–04.
35. RSAAA, F 8, N 216, Pt. 6, f. 67v.
36. Soloviev, *Collected Works*, vol. 2, 57.
37. Soloviev became acquainted with the works of Swedenborg at an early age; his university supervisor Professor P. D. Yurkevich (1826–74) was a convinced follower of Swedenborg. On the similarity between the ideas of Swedenborg and the Kabbalah, see Williams-Hogan, "Emanuel Swedenborg and the Kabbalistic Tradition, 343–60 (especially pp. 353–59, where Swedenborg's concept of the Grand Man is compared with the kabbalistic Adam Kadmon); Abelson, "Swedenborg and the Zohar"; Schuchard, "Emanuel Swedenborg," 177–207; Schuchard, "Dr. Samuel Jacob Falk," 203–22.
38. He thought, however, that Swedenborg did not directly adopt kabbalistic concepts: "Although he [Swedenborg] was seemingly not acquainted with kabbalistic writings, his system absolutely coincides in its basic and interesting parts with the doctrine of Kabbalah." See: Soloviev, "Introduction to David Günzburg's paper," 279. It is appropriate to mention here that Gershom Scholem also doubted that Swedenborg was really acquainted with Jewish Kabbalah. See his letter to Joseph L. Blau (1945): Scholem, *Briefe I*, 294.
39. See note 11. On the putative kabbalistic influences on Jacob Boehme's views see: Schulze, "Jacob Boehme und die Kabbala"; Huber, *Die Kabbala als Quelle zum Gottesbegriff Jakob Boehmes*; Schulitz, *Jakob Boehme und die Kabbalah*; Edel, *Die individuelle Substanz bei Boehme und Leibniz*. See also: Burmistrov, "Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah," 45–63; David, "The Influence of Jacob Boehme on Russian Religious Thought."
40. See Burmistrov, "Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah," 32–34.
41. See Soloviev, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, 261–66, 359–63. Also Burmistrov, "Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah," 67–69.
42. On Soloviev's acquaintances among the Jews see: Belkin, "Vladimir Solov'ev und das Judentum," 21–36.
43. See Soloviev, *Collected Works*, vol. 9, 111–16.
44. Soloviev wrote to Baron David Günzburg in 1896: "In Russian society, not only the experts in Jewish mysticism are absent but even amateurs like me who are competent to understand and evaluate a scholarly work made by somebody are few" (Soloviev, *Letters*, 140).
45. On some of these concepts see Burmistrov, "Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah," 96–99.
46. See, for example: Carlson, "Gnostic Elements in the Cosmogony of Vladimir Soloviev," 51; Kornblatt, "Russian Religious Thought and the Jewish Kabbala," 75–95; Kornblatt, "Solov'ev's Androgynous Sophia and the Jewish Kabbalah"; Bar-Yosef, "Sophiology and the Concept of Femininity in Russian Symbolism."

47. See Frensch, "Wisdom in Personality"; Frensch, *Weisheit in Person*. His idea is shared by Victoria Kravtchenko: Kravtchenko, *Vladimir Soloviev and Sophia*, 301–06.
48. One can find biographical data on the Russian mystic Anna N. Schmidt (1851–1905) and her own published writings in: Bulgakov and Florenski, *From the Manuscripts of Anna Nikolaevna Schmidt*; cf.: Soloviev, *Vladimir Soloviev* 399–401.
49. See Bulgakov, *The Non-Evening Light*, 129–30.
50. Muretov, *The Doctrine of Logos in Philo and John the Theologian*. Bulgakov criticizes the interpretation given by Muretov to the role of the angel Metatron in the Creation. See Bulgakov, *The Non-Evening Light*, 121–22.
51. Bulgakov, *The Non-Evening Light*, 137. On the concept of Ein Sof, see *ibid.*, 120–22, 129–30, 136–37.
52. *Ibid.*, 209. He affirms overtly elsewhere (226) that "nothing [...] cannot be the source of everything—ex nihilo nihil fit." Since the 13th century, many kabbalists argued against the concept of "creatio ex nihilo," contrasting it with the doctrine of emanation of the Sephirot. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 88–105.
53. Bulgakov, *The Non-Evening Light*, 345, 247, 246–50, 247–53, 256–61, 237, 252, 259, 252–54, 258. On the kabbalistic interpretation of marriage see *ibid.*, 257. Cf.: Bulgakov, *Gentle Thoughts*, 96, where Bulgakov criticizes Soloviev's "mystical erotic" and contrasts it with Kabbalah as "a treasury of the age-old mystical wisdom."
54. For more details, see Burmistrov, "Vladimir Soloviev and Kabbalah," 78–87.
55. Bulgakov, *The Non-Evening Light*, 190. For material about Sophia, see *ibid.*, 185–201.
56. *Sepher ha-Zohar (Le Livre de la Splendeur). Doctrine ésotérique de Israélites*.
57. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 298; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 240. Cf. also: Scholem, *Bibliographia Kabbalistica*, 120; and Scholem, *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem*, 149–50.
58. Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 298.
59. Florenskii, *Collected Works*, vol. 1, 96.
60. See, for example, Florenskii, *Collected Works*, vol. 2, 435, 582, 720, 725, 727; vol. 3, part 1, 445, 462, 476; vol. 3, part 2, 61, 108, 176, 278, 490; Florenskii, *Collected Works in Two Vols*, vol. 1, 731; vol. 2, 149, 310, 359–62; Florenskii, *Names*, 18–20, 178–79.
61. For the similarity between the linguistic theory of Kabbalah and the doctrine of language and names in Russian philosophy of the early 20th century see: Burmistrov, "Christian Orthodoxy and Jewish Kabbalah"; Burmistrov, "Imyaslaviye and Kabbalah," 34–37; Burmistrov, "Pavel Florenskii as a Hebraist."
62. The work of Pappus (1865–1916), translated into Russian, was probably the main source of his knowledge about the Kabbalah (real and occult). About Pappus, see: André and Beaufils, *Pappus, biographie*; Laurant, "Pappus," 915.
63. See Florenskii, *Collected Works in Two Vols*, vol. 1, 731 (n. 462).
64. Pappus, *Kabbala: the Teaching on God, Universe and Man*.
65. See Leiningen-Billigheim, *L'âme d'après la Qabalah*.
66. See Saunier, *Saint-Yves d'Alveydre*; Lenain, *La science cabalistique*; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 203.
67. Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 3, part 2, 61. On the interpretation of circumcision by Florenskii as compared with that in Sergei Bulgakov, see Bulgakov, *The Non-Evening Light*, 258.
68. Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 3, part 2, 108, 114.
69. Among the recent publications on the *imyaslaviye* movement see Hylarion (Alfeev), *The Holy Mystery of the Church*; Borshch, *Imyaslaviye*; Leskis, *Dispute Over the Name of God*. Cf. also: Bezlepkin, *Philosophy of Language in Russia*, 324–80.

70. Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 3, part 2, 333, 188.
71. Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 3, part 1, 293, 362.
72. See Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*.
73. Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala," 79. On different linguistic concepts of Kabbalah see also: Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, 314–52 (esp. 319–20); Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, 76–121; Idel, "Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism," 42–79; Idel, "Defining Kabbalah," 97–122; Katz, "Mystical Speech and Mystical Meaning," 3–41; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 190–260.
74. The final version of this work was appeared in 1923–26. It was published for the first time in Moscow in 1993, and later was included in Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 3, part 2, 169–358.
75. Florenskii analyses not only ordinary names but also the names from the New Testament; for example, he discusses the pair Saul/Paul, asserting that the change of names symbolizes the deep spiritual change in the soul of the apostle. See Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, Vol. 3, part 2, 309. A book devoted to this topic, written by Florenskii as early as in 1907, was first published recently: Florenskii, *Sacred Renaming*.
76. Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 3, part 1, 277–81.
77. Fabre d'Olivet, *La langue hébraïque restituée*. About Fabre d'Olivet, see Cellier, *Fabre d'Olivet*.
78. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 25; Kilcher, *Die Sprachtheorie der Kabbala als ästhetisches Paradigma*, 66.
79. Scholem, "The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala," 75.
80. Florenskii was known to read the Russian translation of *Sefer Yezirah* made by the Russian Hebraist N. Pereferkovitch (published as an appendix to Papus, *Kabbala*, 337–52).
81. Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 3, part 2, 221–22.
82. See, for example, *ibid.*, 453, 463; Andronik, *Theodicea and Anthropodicea*, 126.
83. Nikitin, "Gnostic Motives in Pavel Florenskii's poetry," 74. Italics are mine. Florenskii obviously reckoned himself among the "the occultists by the grace of God," whereas "the odour of garlic" alludes to Jews.
84. Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 3, part 2, 139–40.
85. Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 135–40; Tishby, *Torat ha-ra ve-ha-kelippah be-kabbalat ha-Ari*, 62–90.
86. "Nishmatan shel ha-goyim hem mi-gimel klippot... she kulam ra". Cf.: "The souls of non-Jews come from ... totally impure kelippot which do not contain any good." (R. Shneur Zalman of Lyadi, "Likkutei Amarim (Taniya)," 1:1). For more examples see: Tishby, *Torat ha-ra ve-ha-kelippah be-kabbalat ha-Ari*, 105–06.
87. Shefa Tal, Brooklyn, 1960, f. 1a–4c. R. Yosef Gikatila (XIII c.) held quite the same opinion in his "Sha'are Orah." See: Gikatila, *Sha'are Orah*, 49–52.
88. R. Moshe Cordovero, *Shiur Koma*, Warsaw: I. Goldman, 1883, f. 19d (cited in Scholem, *On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, 239).
89. Hallamish, *An Introduction to the Kabbalah*, 269. Cf. also on the attitude of Jewish mystics to the non-Jews: Hallamish, "Aspectim achadim be-sheilat yachasam shel ha-mekubbalim le-ummot ha-olam"; Turov, "On the Attitude of Hasids to the Non-Jews"; Endel, "Between Judaism and Christianity," 81–86.
90. See Butmi, *Kabbalah, Heresies, and Secret Societies*, 32; Pranaitis, *The "Mystery of Blood" Among the Jews*, 21, 25; Butkevich, "On the Meaning of Bloody Sacrifices in Pre-Christian World," 277–81. On the place of kabbalistic texts in the Blood Libel literature in Russia see Burmistrov, "Blood Libel in Russia," 16–37.
91. See Uranus, *The Murder of A. Yushchinsky and Kabbalah*, 9–15.

92. Florenskii, *Collected Works in Two Vols*, vol. 1, 219, 14; Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 2, 435.
93. Rozanov, *Sakharna*, 367, 382, 438.
94. Sergiev Posad, 1915, 5–7; republished in Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 2, 705–07. See also an interesting confession made by Florenskii in 1921: “It is very harmful to have close relations with people of defective spiritual quality; they emit direct infection, and we suffer a certain damage, regardless of whether we know it or not. When I was visiting Jewish families which were well disposed toward me, and which were more honest in respect to morals than Christians, I felt devastated and sucked dry after leaving them; this lack of vital energy I felt for several days [after the visit]” (Florenskii, *Collected Works in Four Vols*, vol. 3, part 2, 424. On the anti-Semitic trends in the worldview of Russian philosophers see also Hagemeister, “Wiederverzauberung der Welt,” 21–41; Hagemeister, “Pavel Florenskij und der Ritualmordwurf,” 59–74; Ullmann, “Heidentum und Christentum,” 116–41; Kuße, “Harmonieangst,” 142–59.
95. Losev was arrested in 1930 and sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment, and *Thing and Name* was confiscated together with some others of Losev’s manuscripts. It was published only recently: Losev, *The Name. Works and Translations*, 168–245; Losev, *Personality and Absolute*, 306–76; this chapter, entitled “From the History of Name,” contains numerous quotations from the Zohar and some other kabbalistic texts, lengthy expositions of the theory of Sephiroth etc. Unfortunately some parts of this work have been lost.
96. Losev, *Personality and Absolute*, 308–09, 310–21.
97. Pauly, *Le livre du Zohar*; Losev quoted pages 29–51 and 62–70.
98. See transcripts of interrogation of Valentina Loseva (1930) published in the newspaper *Russkaya Mysl’* (Russian Thought), 1996, no. 4150, 12. V. M. Loseva was arrested together with her husband in 1930 and was sentenced to five years imprisonment.
99. Valentina Loseva testified during her interrogation that only Boris Stolpner discussed the problems of the Kabbalah with Losev. See: Takho-Godi, “From the Archeology.” According to Shimon Dubnov, Stolpner was “typical ‘permanent opponent’ on every Jewish meetings,” he was “a strange mixture of a casuist and a mystic,” and his views were “a mishmash of historical materialism and mystical spiritualism.” See: Dubnov, *Book of Life*, 326, 353–54.
100. Some of Stolpner’s ideas, presented as early as 1914, bear evident similarities to Losev’s interpretation of Kabbalah in the late 1920s. Thus, according to Stolpner, “redemption which is the aim of Kabbalah is not a salvation of the human soul, as in Christian gnosticism, but a salvation of the world and the Godhead by the human being” (Losev, *Dialectics of Myth*, 523).
101. In other words, the French translation of the Zohar. See Takho-Godi, “From the Dialectics of Myth to the Absolute Mythology,” 175.
102. Dubnov, *Book of Life*, 32; on Boris Stolpner and his views see also Katsis, “Stolpner on the Jews,” 259–330.
103. Losev’s emphasis in italics; Losev, *Myth, Number, Essence*, 383–84.
104. Losev’s emphasis; Losev, *From the Early Works*, 594.
105. Ibid.
106. Cf., for example, Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*.
107. This document was first published in *Istochnik*; see Losev, “This Is the Way.”
108. For a detailed bibliography on this topic see Katsis, “A. F. Losev, V. S. Soloviev, Maxim Gorky”; see Hagemeister, “Apocalypse of the Our Time.”
109. Losev, “This Is the Way,” 121; 117ff. Ein Sof is called here an “apophatic monster,” “an absolute anarchism which is the final offspring of Kabbalah.”

110. Losev, *Personality and Absolute*, 464.
111. Losev, *Aesthetics of the Renaissance*, 372.
112. See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 42–61.
113. Losev, *Aesthetics of the Renaissance*, 372.
114. Losev, *From the Early Works*, 594.
115. Losev, *Vladimir Soloviev and His Time*, 251.
116. Of course, one can speak about the “Gnostic” and “neoplatonic” trends in kabbalistic thought, as well as in medieval Jewish philosophy. Some kabbalists used separate elements of these doctrines, but it would be hardly right to declare them the very essence of Kabbalah. See Idel, “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” 319–86.
117. Soloviev, “Introduction to David Günzburg’s paper,” 277.
118. *Ibid*, 279.

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