

C. Knight, Keith Ward, and Philip Clayton; "II: Scientific Perspectives on the God-World Relation," with contributions from Paul Davies, Russell Stannard, Robert L. Herrmann, Harold J. Morowitz, and with an additional essay by Arthur Peacocke; "III: Theological Perspectives on the God-World Relation," which is subdivided into "Eastern Orthodox" and "Western Christian," with contributions from Kallistos Ware, Alexei Nesteruk, Andrew Louth, Denis Edwards, Joseph A. Bracken, S.J., Ruth Page, and Celia E. Deane-Drummond. The volume concludes with a helpful summary by Philip Clayton of the various nuances of panentheism held by each author.

With the exception of Keith Ward's contribution, there is little in the way of comparative faith traditions analysis. This is understandable however, if only because of the volume's focus on the religion-science dialogue, and its desire to keep the discussion within accessible limits. In this volume, one will find insightful criticisms of the pantheistic perspective given by a number of authors, but notably by Ruth Page in her discussion of the influential position of process theism. Overall, *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being* provides a good introduction to the diversity of pantheistic thought in contemporary theological/theology-science discussion, and will likely be appreciated by those new to the subject, as well as by those who desire a fairly concise reference of the current discussion on panentheism.

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***Physician of the Soul, Healer of the Cosmos: Isaac Luria and his Kabbalistic Fellowship.* By Lawrence Fine. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. ISBN 0-8047-3825-4. Pp. 480.**

Isaac Luria (also known by his acronym, the ARI) was one of the foremost kabbalists of all time, whose unique interpretation of the Zohar set in motion a system of mystical thought that is still followed and built upon today. The Zohar (the *Book of Splendor*, chiefly a mystical commentary on the Torah) was authored in late thirteenth-century Spain by Moses de Leon, who claimed that the text's real author was the second-century rabbinic sage Shimon bar Yohai (known as Rashbi). Luria was born in Jerusalem in 1534 and moved to Egypt as a young child, where he stayed until he returned to Jerusalem during the 1560s. From 1570 until his death in 1572 he resided in Safed. It was during this period that he formulated his path-breaking innovations in Jewish mystical thought.

Following Luria's death a string of legendary traditions about him began circulating that were transmitted over time with ever-growing embellishments and which resulted in a veritable hagiography. Even today these traditions are very much alive. At the same time, his followers began disseminating his mystical teachings and added their own insights. The paradox of a strong tendency to restrict Luria's teachings to a very small elite paired with a wide diffusion of those same teachings through the works of those who had gotten

to them indirectly gave rise to what is now known as Lurianic Kabbalah. This development took place especially during the two centuries prior to the rise of Hasidism in the late eighteenth century, which in turn interpreted the teachings in its own particular way.

Until Gershom Scholem, the pioneering scholar of Jewish mysticism, lifted Luria's writings from obscurity in the mid-twentieth century, they had not received much attention in the scholarly world. But following Scholem's one lecture, interest faded once again. Recent years have seen a shift in the field. As Fine points out (7–8), "a number of scholars of Jewish mysticism have observed with increasing frequency the extent to which the history of kabbalistic research has tended to reflect a preoccupation with the mythic and theoretical ideas of Kabbalah at the expense of its social, devotional, and experiential dimensions." Thus, hardly any attention was given to the historical conditions, the social communities in which the practical kabbalistic life evolved, or Luria's biographical data. Comparing his own work to that of Yehuda Liebes (9), who "places Luria the individual, and his existential relationship to his circle of disciples, at the center of his concerns," Fine goes further by offering here a book length study rather than a lengthy essay dealing specifically with Luria's role as a charismatic authority, his techniques of mystical meditation and other practical disciplines that he taught (9). This study seeks to fill the gaps of what can be known about this pivotal figure in the history of Jewish thought. Much attention is given to the human physical aspects of both mystical practices and the "story" that powered it in what Fine terms "the embodied nature of Lurianic Kabbalah." By this he means that this movement's primary focus was on a "life of praxis" rather than on "speculative and theoretical matters" (9).

The first three chapters cover the historical background of Luria's world and his early biography. They describe political and religious life in Ottoman Egypt and in the cities of Jerusalem and Safed up until Luria took up residence in the latter where he established his charismatic authority among his disciples. Fine also reconstructs what might be known of Luria's real life in Safed based on what members of his inner circle wrote about him. Fine is careful to separate what is likely to be authentic from the anecdotal and legendary. These chapters show us a young man who was learned in traditional rabbinic lore but at the same time was an active spice trader in his uncle's business. It is shown how he tended towards the mystical traditions, primarily those of thirteenth-century Spanish Kabbalah, that were transmitted by his teachers. Fine also explains the basic tenets of the central Kabbalistic myth, an essential point being that during the process of creation a flaw had crept in, disrupting both the cosmic harmony as well as that existing between the upper world of the divine and the lower material world. This is independent of the additional rupture created through Adam's error and the subsequent descent of future souls associated with him. Luria's innovation lies in the notion that certain individuals have the potential to restore both the cosmic rift as well as elevate those souls to their intended position. This is done specifically through intense acts of penitence, which Luria assigned a new cosmic meaning. Among the practices of penitence already common among the pre-Lurianic Safed mystics were frequent fasting, self-mortification, nightly devotions, and mourning for

the exile and the destroyed Temple. This gloomy picture, however, is countered by “joy in the service of God” (74, 75), which was experienced on the Sabbath and during festivals as well as “the celebration of life-cycle events” during which fine clothes were worn and festive meals were accompanied by song.

Chapter Four traces the development of the Lurianic cosmogonic and anthropological myths. Scholem has compared this effectively with the much earlier Gnostic myth of creation, something Fine indicates as well (133, and esp. 144ff). While there are no direct lines of influence, it is certainly interesting to note the existence of a number of similarities between the two myths.

Chapter Five describes how and why Luria became known as the “physician of the soul.” In order for individuals to contribute to the healing (*tiqqun*) of the cosmos, they must first be beyond reproach themselves, purged of transgressions, and have reached a level of personal sanctification. Luria was able, according to the accounts, to diagnose illness within one’s inner being and prescribe remedies for the detected spiritual flaws. These would usually consist of exercises of intense physical exertion, such as long fasts and exposure to extreme temperatures. One of his means of diagnosis was through the divinatory art of metoposcopy in which he was considered to be a master. In the Lurianic version this specifically meant the ability to distinguish and interpret luminous Hebrew letters that would appear on subjects’ forehead, revealing their state of mind, level of or lack of sinfulness and the like. At the end of the chapter, Fine compares these practices with those current among the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* (the German Pietists) of the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Some of their writings may indeed have ended up in similar circles in Spain of the subsequent period.

Chapters Six and Seven explain how the cosmos may be healed through the performance of the commandments (*mitzvot*), of which rabbinic tradition lists 613, consisting of 248 positive and 365 negative ones. The kabbalists have always been meticulous in upholding rabbinic law, and for this reason the rabbinic leadership tolerated their, at times, radical innovations. Luria, however, infused “its fulfillment with theosophical and theurgical significance,” (219) thereby modifying the reasons for its observance. One of the most important objectives was the restoration of cosmic harmony, within the Deity, the upper and lower realms, and to restore the pure divine light that had become shattered throughout the world. One specific commandment concerned the proper fulfillment of the sexual act, which, in Lurianic thought, rose to new levels. Another one concerned the way of ushering in the Sabbath and conducting of the sacred meals. A further component of *tiqqun* was devotional prayer. Mystical circles already understood the liturgy as having deep esoteric meaning, much beyond its literal surface. For Luria, however, it became an instrument for attaining *tiqqun* and *devequt* (cleaving to the divine).

Chapter Eight is concerned with the nature of the souls of the departed and their intercessory and revelatory power. Luria had devised intricate rituals, based on notions found in the Zohar, to attain mystical communion with the souls of departed saintly teachers. These were to be performed at gravesites.

The final chapter centers on the relationship that existed between Luria and his disciples on the one hand and the souls of Shimon bar Yohai (Rashbi) and his circle as they were typified in the Zohar on the other. Rashbi was

accorded a strong messianic identity in the Zohar, from which Luria, who considered him to be his soul-ancestor, derived similar distinction. The souls of his disciples were linked to those of Rashbi's disciples. Rashbi's soul, in particular, represented the recycled souls of earlier redeemers from Jewish history. The idea that underlies this process is the principle of metempsychosis or transmigration of souls (*gilgul*), which is not really part of mainstream Judaism but has been productively employed by mystical schools.

Lawrence Fine has written extensively on Lurianic thought and practice and with this eminently readable and well-researched book has produced a welcome addition to the scholarship on Kabbalism in general and Luria in particular. One of the additional merits of this study is its placement of many of the typically Lurianic traits into a wider sociological and intellectual context, namely that of the thought world of Gnosticism, Sufism, shamanism, as well as other branches of Jewish thought. A quite novel and welcome field to be explored that Fine introduces is the issue of "Lurianic Kabbalah and women" (15), dealing with the notion of charismatic women within the mystical community (120), and the role of women in the preparation of many of the rites that are not part of the liturgy itself (254). This book is a necessary source for anyone who wants to know something about Kabbalah and its important representatives other than the travesty of this fascinating side of Judaism that is espoused by today's popular culture.

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***The Beauty of the Infinite: The Aesthetics of Christian Truth.* By David Bentley Hart. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003. ISBN: 0-8028-2921-X. Pp. 448.**

As a contemporary work of Christian apologetics, David Bentley Hart's recent major book takes very seriously the challenge posed by what he sees today as Christianity's primary opponent: post-modernism. The author devotes just over 150 pages to the detailed articulation and refutation of post-modernism's many brands, all of which are, for Hart, in the end "ontologies of violence," but ultimately he finds its challenge untroubling for the Christian evangel, which he defines by (and even beyond) contrast as an ontology of peace. The primary impetus of the work, to that extent, is not strictly polemical, but rather evangelical, and is guided by the question (and not simply *a* question—for Christian rhetoric is, for Hart, prominently an aesthetics) concerning the theological defensibility of the beauty to which the evangelical tradition appeals. Hart articulates his guiding question the most completely as follows: "Can the Christian evangel of peace advance itself rhetorically, as beauty, in such a way as to make that peace real? Can the beauty of Christian rhetoric narrate itself in perfect consonance with the story of ontological peace that it