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“SONSHIP” AND ITS RELEVANCE FOR  
JEWISH AND NON-JEWISH MYSTICAL  
LITERATURES

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Moshe Idel’s book is a comprehensive account of a religious *topos*, which is common to both Jewish and Christian religious teachings, namely the figure of the *Son of God*. Yet, the emphasis of Idel’s book is on the idea of “sonship” as extant in Jewish religious thought, beginning with the earliest written accounts of Jewish religious life from the Hebrew Bible. This book is also a historical account of the occurrence of the term “Son” (*Ben*) in all the key stages of Jewish religious literature, beginning with the story of the creation of Man from the Hebrew text of the Book of *Genesis* and ending with the latest contemporary Hasidic commentaries, which pertain to the idea of the “Son of God.” Alongside with the Jewish sources cited and analyzed here, this book entails an outstanding gathering of texts from Biblical literatures parallel to the Jewish traditions, such as Christian and Gnostic literatures. What is also contributing to the understanding of the term *Ben* at the various stages of its developments is the various non-Biblical literature, such as Hellenistic and Arab Neo-Platonic and Neo-Aristotelian theological and philosophical literatures, Hermeticism, Sufism, Pythagoreanism, and astrology. Special attention is given to the theological and philosophical treatises of the Renaissance.

The present approach is to closely follow the text by means of a step-by-step analysis of the key religious and philosophical ideas in this book. The paper will proceed by defining the subject and the method of analysis outlined in the *Introduction* and by commenting on the main topics brought forth by each of the seven chapters of the book.

The *Introduction* debates on the topic and the main sources of the book. The book begins with the distinction between the “theophanic” and the “apothotic” vectors, a distinction which is used in other contexts of Idel’s writings<sup>1</sup>. Idel founds his main view about religious experience on the idea of a continuous circulation between the “high” and the “low,” the divine and the human. Religious experience, therefore, is bound to promise a continuous flow between these realms: “The continuous existence of an open circuit between the divine and the human worlds is part and parcel of most religious worldviews. With movement between these worlds achieved

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either by humans ascending to the divine realm or by the divine intervention in the earthly world below, the belief in such open channels is vital in sustaining an intense religious life" (p. 1).

This is the moment where the concept of *sonship* steps in, because the relation between the divine realm and the human realm may take the form of a relation concerning a divine Father, a divine or a higher Son, and the humans, who are considered the lower "sons." In this case, the emerging "sonship" entails not two, but actually three factors: God, the (hypostatic) Son of God and the humans, "the recipient(s) of the message or revelation." The hypostatic Son represents a "manifestation and a proclamation of the Father's will or being" and performs many functions: "creator of the world," "revealer of divine truth," "messenger of the divine," "door to the father" (Philonic *horos*), "path to the divine, in whose image the son has been created" (Christian), "seal or stamp of the divine," "redeemer sent by the divine Father" (p. 2). Generally, the concept of *sonship* is circumscribed by the "similarities that define the connections between the three factors" (p. 2).

Actually, Idel speaks here of a "double" sonship, between the Father and the Son and between the Son and the recipients (p. 2). The double sonship, however, stimulates not only the higher towards the lower, substituting the latter to the former, but also the lower towards the higher. Therefore, the double sonship envisages not only the "resemblance of the lower to the higher," but also of the higher to the lower, i.e. "the possibility of sharing some essence either because of a primordial affinity, or because of the development of the lower entity, which strives to assimilate to the higher" (p. 2). In this case, sonship is not only a question of the Son subordinating to the Father, but also of the son becoming a higher Son, a Son of God. Thus, the relation goes both ways: from the Father to the Son (*theophanic*), and from the son to the higher Son (*apothotic*), keeping the circuit "open" between the human and the divine realm. The nature of this double relation depends on the nature of its factors: if religion is anthropomorphic, the descriptions emphasize the *morphe* of the three factors and their characteristics: beauty, size, power, face, speech. If religious teaching is more philosophical, then God is intellect, the *Son of God* is the embodied intellect etc., emphasizing the *eidōs*. The "theophanic" vector is cosmogonic, theogonic and theosophic, and the "apothotic" vector is ritualic and mystical, i.e. "designed to ensure the mystic's ascent on high" (p. 3). Furthermore, in achieving his goal by *apotheosis*, the mystic may have a *theophanic* role, in the sense that he becomes a "sort of the Son of God" (p. 3).

As regards the major issue of the "Son of God" in Christianity, Idel contends that, until recently, „sonship" has unsuccessfully been connected only to Christian or Christian-related sources: "the concept of the Son of God is not necessarily a Christological one in Jewish mystical literatures" (p. 3). Actually, divine sonship is present in the Hebrew Bible (*Ps.* 2.7, 72.2,

*Isa.* 9.5, *Deut.* 14.1), but the main focus of Idel's book is related to scholarship concerning the "later forms of Judaism." Thus, "post-biblical Jewish discussions of sonship" are not widely discussed as opposed to sonship in the Hebrew Bible, in pagan sources of Late Antiquity, and in the Greek Bible. In Idel's book, the post-biblical Jewish sources of sonship seen as an extensive "phenomenon of the sonship of God" are synthetically dealt with "for the first time" (p. 3). By this day, the concept of "sonship" has been extensively discussed in the scholarly search for the "sources of Christianity" (pre-Christian Jewish documents, the Qumran literature, contemporary to Christian texts, or the post-biblical documents), but not comprehensively regarding the Jewish mystics of the early Middle Ages (see p. 67 for the term "Jewish mysticism"). Moreover, "in some forms of post-biblical Jewish literature, new conceptual understandings of divine sonship have been advanced over the centuries," as well as, in some cases, besides the impact of Christianity, "many non-Christological forms of sonship of God were found in late antiquity" (p. 4). In addition, Christianity essentially treasured one special form of sonship of God, that of the "one and ultimate incarnate Son," whilst in some forms of Judaism, "more democratic" sonships were pervasive. Besides, Christian texts are not absolutely confined to the notion of a hypostatic son. Idel illustrates this with the passage from 1 *Jn* 3.2-3, clearly suggesting the relation between sonship and mysticism.

As the author himself explains, his book is part of a "broader scholarly project" of elucidating the developments of Jewish mysticism in terms of a dynamic relation between the "apothotic" and the "theophanic vector" (p. 4). This kind of method is comprehensive, at the same time preserving the manifoldness of cross-currents and separate unfoldings of the various forms of Jewish mysticism and acknowledging the dynamics between these two "vectors," the apothotic and the theophanic (p. 4). Such kind of multiplex commitment to the history of Jewish religious currents does make the theological approach avoidable, which subscribes to a "static" difference between religion and mysticism. It also eschews the "unilinear histories" of Jewish mysticism, the "homogenous understandings" of its content, putting aside the controversies generated by Gershom Scholem's school of interpretation or the simplistic histories that create connections "beyond" the evidence presented by particular texts (p.5). A consequence of this perspective is that, ultimately, Jewish mysticism is seen as neither depending on other influences, nor isolated from the cultural worlds in which it unfolds (p. 5).

Regarding perhaps the most interesting aspect of post-biblical Judaism as related to sonship, which is considered to be the rising impact of median entities, Idel contends that, in certain circumstances, the two vectors concur. The theophanic uses the medial entities as modes of revelation, as the apothotic envisages the identification between the ascendant and the median structure. Some texts understand the divine Son

as a theophanic mode of divine revelation, while others see it in a context of ascent to a high realm<sup>2</sup>. The same situation occurs in other cases of median entities, as angels or divine names, which might belong, separately or united, either to the mystical or to the magical realm<sup>3</sup>.

There is, of course, the issue of the semantic field active in the biblical Hebrew term "Son," *Ben*, which is wholly different from its correlatives in Greek or Latin. *Ben*, as Idel explains, has its root in BNH, "to build," and relates to *Binyan*, building, and *Boneh*, builder, or, extravagantly etymologized, to *Binah*, or *Havannah*, "understanding" (p. 11). Differently, the Greek *teknon*, as in the "child of God," is related to *tiktein*, "to give birth," whilst the Latin term *filius* exhibits the idea of "connectiveness" or "derivation" (p. 11). Furthermore, this aspect of the semantic field alone, which differentiates between a concrete Hebrew and an abstract Greek understanding of the term *Son*, raises the issue of different Bible literatures, and, of course, of a complicated history of "sonships," even at the core of one allegedly single Bible tradition (in our case, Christianity) (p. 12).

Clearly, the question "How many Christians understand the meaning of the name of Jesus, or have an idea about the linguistic *imaginaire* that inspired his activity, and are able to pronounce the name of his main description: *Ben*, the son, in biblical Hebrew [?]" (p. 13) is to the reader a formulation of the most intriguing scholarly and non-scholarly issue proposed by this book, which, by virtue of its approach, demands an open answer. Obviously, the main concern of the book is that although "Son" is an essential median figure in many religious texts, in the field of religious studies there is not one big meaning (and reading) of the term *Ben*. Rather, there are "significant affinities" between many of the meanings and readings of this major term, these affinities reflecting either common sources or influences among these readings. To be sure, Idel's concedes that his approach is not a "deconstructive approach" (p. 65). Nevertheless, theologically-derived solutions are to be avoided (see pgs. 58, 63), so the reader could freely acknowledge the plethora of intricate theoretical variants of "sonship" extant in the various texts themselves, variants which are no longer (euphemistically) collectable under a stalemated single name as "Christian tradition" or "Jewish tradition." In this reading, the hard nuclei of doctrinal differences become obsolete. Every text, be it Gnostic, Christian, Islamic, or Jewish is of the same importance to the researcher. This is why topics like "sonship" are read into various religious narratives, ranging from the Qumran literature, the Nag Hammadi library, the Hebrew and the Greek Bible, the Heikhalot literature to Polish eighteenth-century Hasidism.

The topic and the method of the book being thoroughly established, the author proceeds by illustrating with passages from the Hebrew Bible, tracking back the concept of "sonship" as developed under a largely theophanic vector (*Exod.* 23.20-24; *Dan.* 7.9-14). Actually, Daniel 7.9-14 is the

first occurrence of the term "Son of Man" in the Hebrew Bible, and this is related, in Idel's explanation, to the issue of the "theophoric mediator" (p. 18 sqq.), which aptly corresponds to the question of "double sonship" (p. 19). Worth mentioning is the relation between mediators: angels and divine names (p. 15 sqq.) - on the one hand, the "Son of Man", and on the other hand, the divine name (p. 21 sqq.). The "morphic" and the "nominal" aspect of the sonship relating God and Jesus are very well illustrated by two passages from the New Testament (*Hebr.* 1.2-5; *Rev.* 19) and from other different sources.

On page 34, the discussion about the meaning of "sonship" resurfaces. While searching interpretive tools for surveying Jewish mystical literatures, inspired by a Gnostic Valentinian text ascribed by Origen to Heracleon (p. 33), Idel identifies four main types of sonship that appear in various degrees along the histories of the majority of Biblical literatures:

1) sonship by generation (the Son is generated by the Father, he reflects his Father by his "face" or by his "name") - a case of this kind of sonship is the creation of Adam in *Gen.* 2.27;

2) sonship by emanation (the Son is related to the Father by being emanated from him) - this kind of sonship appears, for example, in Philo and in the Nicaean Creed (the Christian canonical doctrine of *homoousia*);

3) sonship by adoption (the Son is initially human, who then becomes a Son by adoption; the process of becoming a Son is lead by the divine powers) - the case is relevant, for example, in the rabbinic literature of the "righteous;"

4) sonship by vocation (the case of a human becoming a Son mainly as a result of human initiative).

It is visible that the first two categories are essentially theophanic and the last two mainly apotheotic. And yet, there is also a fifth type of sonship, a mixture, a complex type found in the Philonic Logos, as encompassing both "the Son of God," and the "father of the sage." In the passage from Philo's *The Confusion of Tongues* (pgs. 35-36), Idel reads three types of sonship: the "Logos in relation to God," the relation involving the humans as "Sons of God," and finally the relation involving the "Sons of Man," i.e. the "Sons of the Logos" (p. 36). There is, obviously, a double sonship here, represented by the "Sons of God" and the "Sons of the Logos." This type of "double sonship," Idel concedes, is related more to the creation of a "framework for religious and in many cases mystical life," than to the "way in which the supernal divinity created the world," as it is the case with the single type of sonship (p. 36). This kind of intellectual vision of the Logos raises new questions about the nature of the Sons of the Logos and about the Logos itself (p. 37). In the history of early Christianity, especially starting with the Paulinian texts, Logos was consecrated as Jesus, the "Son of God," and the "Sons of Man" were the "Sons of the Logos," the "individual Christians becoming sons by adoption" (p. 38). This variant of "double sonship" is also present in Abraham Abulafia's mysticism, who

understands himself as an "adopted son" in relation to a cosmic Agent Intellect, which is a "son" itself (p. 38).

So far, Idel argues, we can identify a "genetic sonship" (the Agent Intellect personified as a "Son"), which is associated to another "adoptive sonship" (the expression "adoptional sonship" is to be found in Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3.16.3), involving the presence of an ordinary human being. Actually, the Philonic text mentioned above is "the first formulation of such a double theory of sonship," which is only later found implicitly in *Rom.* 8.14-15. In the Greek Bible, therefore, the case of Jesus might sometimes encompass a case of "double sonship," as Jesus is, though only implicitly, both a hypostatic son, and a human being, a human "son." However, in the case of the Christian doctrine of redemption, Jesus is seen as a redemptive "adoptive" figure, which reflects a "human" sonship, capable of rescuing humanity by his passion and love. Thus, following Idel's reasoning, we see the Christian case of Jesus as a particular case of a more general situation, where "a representative of a transcendental entity descending toward the mundane world is conceived of as capable of elevating the human (...)" (p. 39). Philo's example of a hypostatic intellect described as a "Son" is another particular case of the same general situation, because the human is rescued here by an act of intellection stemming from the hypostatic Son.

As mentioned above, on p. 21 the "morphic" and the "nominal" aspect of the God-Son relation are extant in a wide variety of Jewish mystical writings. Another form of God-Son relation is at hand in the process of "emanation" of an "exalted entity" from God (p. 40). This kind of relation is first found in the Jewish-Hellenistic treatise *The Wisdom of Solomon* ("Wisdom" playing here the role of the "Son"). The idea of the Son as an emanation of God is yet to be found in Origen's Christology. Actually, *The Wisdom of Solomon* served as a direct source for Origen (p. 41 sqq.).

Christ as the Son of God appears yet in another form: that of an angel and of a man. In a passage written by the Christian author Justin Martyr, where he comments on the various doctrines concerning the nature of Christ, he mentions that, for a certain "group" (supposed to be Jewish), Christ is the Son of God appearing as a "Man" and also as an "Angel" (p. 43). Justin himself described an entity named "Glory," which is also "man" and "angel," as opposed to the "son" as "redeemer," but both stemming from the "divine" (p. 44). The idea of an entity described as a man and as an angel is also to be found in other ancient and medieval Jewish texts. The rationale of these various texts is that "Son of God," the "Man," and the "Angel" reflect the same divine entity in different forms or "ranks," also describing a process of emanation where the emanator and the emanated are strongly connected. Thus, emanation does not (necessarily) mean separation. Nevertheless, since the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, canonical Christianity has rejected the idea of Christ as an angel and preferred instead the relation between a first and a second God (see also the centrality of the

"Son" in Christianity and his special characteristic as God "incarnated" explained at p. 58 sqq). The same process of an angel becoming a "lesser" God is revealed by Jewish mystical literatures and by rabbinic Judaism (p. 45). Hypostatic readings of the "Son" can also be found in Jewish Heikhalot literature (p. 46).

The second part of the title of the book, "Sonship and Jewish Mysticism," is discussed on p. 67. There, Idel stresses the essential character of "Son" to the term "mysticism," since the general term "mysticism," roughly described as a form of "experience," of "contact with the divine world," is better explained and understood when represented by the powerful symbolic figure of the "Son." In the context of mysticism, therefore, "Sonship should be (...) understood as the attainment of closeness to the divine realm (...) through either righteousness, or intellection, or by performance of rituals (understood as magical or as theurgical)" (p. 67).

The role of the "Son" in relation to mysticism being established, the following chapters of the book will thoroughly emphasize the role played by the figure of the Son in various Jewish religious literatures.

The first chapter, "Righteousness, Theophorism and Sonship in Rabbinic and Heikhalot Literatures," analyses various figures from the Heikhalot writings - a special collection of mystic texts describing the religious experiences of a school, which originated in Palestine in Talmudic (220-500 CE) or even Tannaitic (70-200 CE) times - that are sometimes envisioned as having hypostatic existence or as attaining "theophoric" names. Rabbinic literature, however, which specifically contains texts from the period currently known as the "Talmudic era" (200-500 CE), presents "Son"-figures that are more "intercessors" than "theophoric mediators" (p. 156). With the development of Jewish religion, Idel argues, one can observe a tendency towards the "multiplication of divine powers, attributes and names for God" (p. 156), therefore a multiplication of median figures, which, in time, will replace the direct, personal, unmediated relation between God and his creation, an expansion which is called a "centrifugal development." This is a tendency in replacing ancient personal depictions of God with various mediators (hierarchies of "angels," "sefirah" and, of course, various "Son"-figures) and further resulting also in a (though not entirely) "depersonalized vision" of the mediator itself, which becomes the "intellect," in the Judeo-Arab philosophical traditions of the Middle Ages (p. 157). During this development, obviously, theophanic tendencies combine with the apothotic "vectors," represented by special apothotic biblical figures, such as Moses, Enoch and Elijah. These figures also become "theophoric" names, by the process of interpreting the letters (the consonants) of their names as being in a mystical relation to the very letters of the name of God. Also, the same technique of interpretation shows archangels and angels, like Metatron and Yaho'el "sharing" the same name of God (p. 162).

The second chapter, "The Son of God in Ashkenazi Forms of Esotericism," expresses the author's conviction that Jewish mysticism and the rabbinic literature of late Antiquity are, at least in part, responsible for some development of Medieval Jewish mysticisms. "Sonship" is, obviously, such an element transmitted by tradition and further shaped in the Ashkenazi texts of the Middle Ages. However, the way in which the Jewish esotericism of late Antiquity traveled from the Eastern to the Western Europe of the Middle Ages (especially in Italy, Germany, Spain, and Provence) is another historical conundrum (p. 195 sqq.). The chapter analyzes early Ashkenazi texts written between 1200 and 1290 in the southern and central parts of the modern-day Germany, e.g. the *Commentary on Seventy Names of Metatron*, written by R. Nehemiah ben Shlomo the Prophet of Erfurt, in which *Ben* is a case of *gematria*, and the writings of R. Eleazar of Worms, where *Ben* appears in the same speculative manner. An interesting turn on this discussion is R. Moshe Azriel's interpretation of the "Son" Jesus, as a response to traditional Christology (p. 236 sqq.).

Chapter three, "Son as an Intellectual/Eschatological Entity in Ecstatic Kabbalah," addresses a special kind of Jewish mysticism, the Ecstatic Kabbalah, which, unlike the early discussed Ashkenazi writings, has been deeply influenced by the intellectual currents of the 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe, namely by the Arab Neo-Platonists and Neo-Aristotelists and also by Christianity. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century, many Jewish intellectuals were familiar with elements of ancient Greek philosophy through Arab manuscripts, especially in northern Spain and southern France, where this encounter caused the emergence of a special theoretical synthesis. The founder of the school of Ecstatic Kabbalah is R. Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia (1240-c. 1292). The term *Ben* appears in his commentaries on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* as related to the Aristotelian Agent Intellect, although the role of the term in Abulafia's texts is not plainly philosophical, but also mystical, or "linguistically esoteric" (p. 278 sqq; for the fusion of the mystico-magical and the philosophical traditions, see p. 294 sqq.). *Ben* intervenes as a kabbalistic term in cases of gematric speculation. However, due to philosophical influences, the nature of the relation sustained by the term is changed: resemblance between Son and Father passes from "corporeal isomorphism" to "spiritual resemblance." In other words, "Son" is a "hypostatic intellectual being," an Agent Intellect, which is also responsible for the human intellect that becomes "the quintessence of sonship." Through its intellect, man becomes an "adoptive son," in relation to the Agent Intellect. This is the case of "double sonship," specific to Abulafia, mentioned earlier in the *Introduction* (p. 38). The resemblance between Abulafia and Philo is evident, although not historically defensible (p. 287). Also, the various contexts in which the term *Ben* appears seem to proffer a special messianic tendency to Abulafia's opinions, in the sense that he conceived himself as a "Son of God," by actualizing its potential

intellect and becoming an "agent" intellect, like the Agent Intellect itself (p. 300 sqq.) The treatment of various texts from authors influenced by the Abulafian school of interpretation is informative because it enlightens the influence of Neo-Aristotelism in Jewish Medieval mysticism and philosophy. In addition, Abulafia's interpretations are more universalistic, compelling Jewish mystical ideas to spread out in the Christian world (see Abulafia's interpretation of "Israel" as an Agent Intellect).

Chapter four, "The Sexualized Son of God in the Theosophical-Theurgical Kabbalah," emphasizes the role of concepts, such as "family," "marriage," and "procreation" as related to "Sonship." These elements intervene especially with respect to the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah which is parallel to the Ecstatic Kabbalah. In the case of the theosophical Kabbalah, the image of the Son, as well as that of the Father become "sexualized" images, i.e. these images are conceived as having also sexual, feminine counterparts. The sexualized relation occurs among the *sefirot*, which are sometimes named in couples, as "mother" and "father," or, if we speak of a lower *sefirah*, "son" and "daughter" (p. 382). In this case, the term *Ben* emerges from sexualized relations inside a "divine family" which now includes four members instead of the formerly two, i.e. father/mother, son/daughter. As opposed to the Ecstatic Kabbalah, where "sonship" emerges as "detachment" from life and towards the "simplification" of the human nature to the intellect alone, the theurgical Kabbalah envisions a "humanized" *sonship* emerging from the "complexity" of the relations shaping the human and the divine life altogether, due to the fact that in this form of Kabbalah, the human nature is envisioned in all of its aspects: corporeal, emotional, spiritual and intellectual. As connected to this essential aspect of the theurgical Kabbalah, the usage of Kabbalistic language is transformed from metaphorical to common usage and the mystical experience is conducted not in solitude, but in a "communal" participation of study, prayer or even sexual intercourse (p. 385). When "Son" is related to the *sefirah*, other symbols emerge, such as "Kingship," "Bride," "Daughter," *Shekinah* ("divine presence"), or "Diadem" (*Atarah*). However, the "Son" of the theosophical Kabbalah has a sexual counterpart, which is the *Shekinah*, the divine presence. The two theurgical Kabbalistic texts, the *Bahir* and the *Zohar* also present cases of double sonship, where the son "below" is performing acts influencing the supernal son in the divine realm (p. 410). Other versions of sexualized sonships can be found in R. Moses Cordovero's writings, in R. Isaac Luria's works, in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The messianic sonship present in Abraham Abulafia's works is extant in the writings regarding the 17<sup>th</sup> century Kabbalist Sabbatai Tzevi, who also envisioned himself as the true Messiah. Various testimonies about the Son of God appear in the texts of the Sabbatean school.

Chapter 5, "Christological and Non-Christological Sons of God in the Italian Renaissance and their Reverberations," investigates interesting

cases of encounter between the Christian views of the Son of God and other views, belonging either to various forms of Judaism or to different Hellenistic doctrines of late Antiquity, views which cohabited in the texts of the Renaissance writers, such as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Marsilio Ficino. Renaissance theologies, theosophies and philosophies written by Christian authors are usually known as theoretical syntheses of forms of thought belonging to Christian, Jewish, and Greek or Roman philosophies. As for Jewish mysticism, the Renaissance is the place of the "third" main encounter between the Jewish and the Greek material, after the syncretisms of late Antiquity and the late medieval assimilation of Neo-Aristotelian elements (p. 508). Pico, for example, sought to back up the Christian common view of the Son of God by examining the "possible concordance" between Christian views and other views of the Son as "emanation" (p. 508). Marsilio Ficino, a friend of Pico della Mirandola, had already associated the person of Jesus with the concept of Son in Hermeticism and Zoroastrianism. With the help of the Latin translations of the Hebrew texts, Pico got acquainted with some important Jewish mystical texts, such as some of the writings of Abraham Abulafia. In his famous *Oratio de Dignitate Hominis*, Pico spoke of the man becoming "an angel and the son of God" (quoted at p. 511). He also mentioned the relation between the Son and Tetragrammaton, drawing from Jewish sources (p. 511). He sought to justify the Trinitarian view of God by using various elements from the medieval Kabbalah (e.g. the doctrine of the three divine names). As for Ficino, he combined Christological with non-Christological views of the Son by addressing the issue of the Son with the help of the Neo-Platonic theory of ideas combined with the Aristotelian doctrine of cognition. Thus, in his famous *Platonic Theology*, the Son becomes the "divine intellect that emerges from (...) God" (p. 512). The same synthesis of Christianity and paganism is present in Agrippa von Nettesheim's *De Occulta Philosophia*, where Paul, Virgil, Macrobius, Plato, Porphyry, Augustine, Plotinus and Philo are authors that testify in their writings the same great vision of the trinitarian God, where the Son is God's "first mind," a view bringing indiscriminately together orphic, hermetic, Neo-Platonic, and Christian views of the Son of God (p. 513). Inspired by Neo-Platonism and Hermetism, some Jewish thinkers of the Renaissance formulated visions of sonship different from the Christological ones. This is the case of authors, such as Leone Ebreo (R. Yehudah Abrabanel), R. Yehudah Moscato, R. 'Azariah de Rossi, Abraham Yagel. The non-Christological, synthetic versions of sonship circulated throughout Christian Europe during the Renaissance and the early modern period with the help of Latin translations from various Jewish texts. The impact of Christian Knorr von Rosenroth's *Kabbala Denudata*, published in Germany successively in 1677 and 1684, was very significant to the Christian writers of the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and onwards. The view of sonship present in the

*Kabbala Denudata* was inspirational to famous authors, such as Leibniz, Newton, William Blake or Emanuel Swedenborg.

The sixth chapter, "The Son of God as a Righteous in Hasidism," is dedicated to the research of sonship in a religious teaching, which emerged in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, the "Hasidism" of the 18<sup>th</sup> century is not entirely new and it is itself a modern branch of earlier Hasidic tendencies (see p. 534). This chapter about Hasidism is also of major significance to the study of Jewish religious life in Romania, a country where Hasidism played a significant role for the Romanian Jewry (see also the strong ties between Hasidism and Eastern Christianity discussed on p. 567). The peculiarity of Hasidism is emphasized by its propensity towards *charisma*, a phenomenological trait, which also provides details about the importance of individual figures in Hasidism. Idel contends that this trait is due to the special importance given to sonship in Hasidism (p. 533). The individual religious figure is alive in the person of the "righteous," the *tzaddiq*. The "sonship" figure of R. Hanina ben Dosa' had a major influence on the Hasidic self-understanding (p. 534). Actually, righteousness and mediation were two main religious attributes of the Hasidic teacher (see the image of the righteous as a "pathway and a pipeline" as quoted from R. Israel of Kuznitz's *'Avodat Yisra'el* on p. 535). The Hasidic holy man is also understood as a "ladder," providing redemption to its devotees. However, the image of the Son is not a hypostatic one anymore, but a median form that is "human and divine at the same time" (p. 539). In R. Moshe Hayyim Efrayyim of Sudytkov's version of the parable of the son of the king, a parable related to the founder of the Hasidic movement, R. Israel ben Eliezer, Ba'al Shem Tov (1699-1760), the divine is present in a more immanent and also omnipotent form (p. 553). Also, the way in which a Son knows his Father and achieves greatness is either *via passionis* or *via perfectionis*. The *via passionis* is already present in the Christian view of the Son (*Lk.* 24.26; *Rom.* 8.17), where the Son achieves the status of life through his own death. Some Hasidic masters prefer an interpretation of the Son as a collective Son, the people of Israel, where the acknowledging of the Father is rather *via perfectionis*: "the Hasidic master emphasizes the existence of life even within what seems to be His state of hiding his face. God does not abandon the sons in their apparent decline or descent, but rather disguises himself in order to be discovered by a devoted son." The Son here is no more a unique, hypostatic Son, but a more personalized (collective or individual) son, whose contact with his Father is always possible by way of devotion (p. 557; see also p. 606). Two major renovations are obvious in the Hasidic versions of the Son: first, the Son is not a hypostatic Son anymore, and second, it is possible that every "righteous man" is in some way a Son of God. In Hasidism, righteousness is never believed to be related to a single, unique Son of God. The important thing here is the possibility of a sonship *in the*

present and not related to a unique event that happened in the glorious past (p. 605).

Chapter 7, "Concluding Remarks," addresses the importance of the phenomenon of Sonship to Jewish religious texts in general, also reemphasizing the author's point of view regarding the "diversity" and "richness" of such a religious category in various mystical systems (p. 586). Still, against the earlier and later interpretive tendencies to diminish or to overemphasize the character of mystical Judaism as related to parallel religious currents, such as Christianity, Idel maintains that the Jewish mystical notion of sonship is indeed a self-standing element in Jewish religious traditions, although many reciprocal overlappings of various tendencies were possible during a two-millennium history of Jewish and Christian religious literatures. In a subchapter entitled "Judaism and Christianity," the author maintains that Jewish sonship is not dependent on the Christian view of sonship, not even when the Christian sonship was sharply attacked by Jewish authors. *Inter alia*, there is a strong apothetic vector in Jewish mysticism which envisions sonship in a strong vocational and adoptional vein, highlighting the mystic's special relationship with God. The cases of Abulafia, Cordovero, and the Hasidic *tzaddiq* are relevant here. Christianity, on the other hand, is the doctrine of the "one and single Son of God par excellence;" it also entails a "secondary sonship," but only for those who believe in the "definitive sonship of the Unique Son." In other words, the "secondary sonship" is possible only through a primary sonship (p. 604). To Rabbinic Judaism, Idel asserts, this case of Sonship is too particularistic, as related to the unique figure of Jesus the Son of God, and also too universalistic, since the idea of the "elected" people of God is forgotten, and the status of secondary sonship is attributed only on the basis of faith rather than on the basis of righteousness or of deeds (p. 604). Thus, in Rabbinic Judaism, sonship is endorsed not by the belief in individual salvation but by the presence of genetic and conceptual elements in sonship, which are preserved by the special approval given to ideas, such as procreation and study. Thus, the father-son relation is expressed genetically, through procreation, as well as spiritually, through the involvement of the father in the son's religious upbringing.

This final chapter is also an account of various non-religious Jewish accounts of sonship which are related to religious sources (p. 621 sqq.). Among these, the most important by far is the Freudian account of sonship, which actually also found a way of entrance into the field of religious studies, informing some major interpretations of religious sonship in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see p. 599 sqq.).

The *Appendix*, "Enoch the Righteous, and was there a Cult of Enoch/Metatron in the Middle Ages?," deals with the important figure of the Biblical patriarch Enoch, a figure that, from the late 11<sup>th</sup> century to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, in the territories of Spain, Provence and Rhinelands, became "a righteous individual expert in various bodies of knowledge, who

underwent a transformation and became an angel." Also, the presence of this apotheotic figure predates the medieval Askhenazi traditions and the early Kabbalah. This divinization of Enoch is a tendency parallel to the Christian divinization of Jesus, which, as already noticed, is a religious process that can be traced historically. The presence of Enoch the angel in early medieval texts is actually another refutation of the Freudian agonistic narrative about the relation between the Father and the Son (pp. 661-662).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Moshe Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, Yale UP, New Haven/ London, 1998, 43, 49, 51, 59, 65, 90, 92, 201, 204; *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, CEU Press, Budapest/ New York, 2005, 25; *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, Yale UP, New Haven/ London, 2002, 443.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, CEU Press, Budapest/ New York, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, SUNY Press, Albany, 1995, Ch. 3 "The Mystico-Magical Model", 104-147.