

MYSTIC LIGHT

The Mystic and the Occult in Max Heindel's Writings

Part 4

IN HIS GROUNDBREAKING address on Mt. Ecclesia in 1911, Max Heindel stated that the aim of the Rosicrucian Fellowship was to “meet inquiring minds with a reasonable explanation of the spiritual mysteries ...instead of responding with dictum and dogma not supported by reason” (*TI* 135). Often Heindel views “mystery” as the darkness to be dispelled, the riddle to be solved, the antagonist to be conciliated, the knot to be untangled. The Western Wisdom Teachings were formulated by the Rosicrucian Order to help demystify life by engaging “the ultra-intellectual mind of Europe and America” (142). Max Heindel, the purveyor of these Teachings, knows their value: “We have a philosophy that explains in a better manner than any other philosophy, the problems of life” (168) But will we practice it?

Finally, “It does not matter what we believe, but only how we live; it is not a question of faith, but of showing our faith by works” (*ibid*). With the occultist the emphasis is on knowing and doing. For the mystic, believing in the providence of God to save one is paramount. Again, the Cain-Abel distinction applies. Cain was dissatisfied with the given, he was inoculated with divine discontent. He sought to improve, to explore, to control, to increase yield, to master physical forces. Occultists, the sons of Cain, seek self-mastery to the point of being able to create their own physical bodies. Obviously this ability presumes knowledge of superphysical laws and processes and the power to control the energies they describe. “We each have within a latent spiritual power that is greater than



Max Heindel at Groundbreaking 1911

any worldly power, and as it is unfolding we are responsible for its use” (178).

In ordinary life knowledge is potential power and the more experience we acquire the greater becomes that potential. But there is “the still deeper viewpoint of the occult scientist” (181) that pertains to “the sacrifice of life for the purpose of gaining power” (182). Such a practice constitutes white or black magic, depending on whether the sacrifice is another’s life or power, or one’s own. In his day Heindel may have been so sensitive to the specter of negative occultism that he deferred more frequently to the word *mystic* to convey the sense which *occult* properly imparts. Indeed, he says as much in *Letters to Students*: the average man and woman “look askance at occultism” (224). However, *occult* is, in itself, a neutral term. It is the purpose and motive for which esoteric knowledge and occult power are *used* that determines their moral value.

Earth-based thinking, as an intermediate means of knowing (short of immediate intuition), is destructive—it breaks down tissue in the brain. In fact, “there is always the taking of life in whatever direction we go after knowledge” (186). The point

is to be as harmless as possible, and yet as wise as serpents, as wise as Lucifer. Isn't this our dilemma in a nutshell? The Lucifers, humanity's benefactors in some respects, have foisted this challenge on us—this blessing and bane. Since Lemuria the Lucifer Spirits have “worked on us through the spinal cord and the brain” (199). If they permeate our thoughts, it is for us to become conscious of their influence and to control our thinking and our desire nature. Today, when the *word occult* is used, most people think of black magic.

“At the present time, the sacrifice of life in obtaining knowledge is unavoidable; we cannot help it” (187). “The occultist...is amazed sometimes at the vast loss of separate life that is...sacrificed to no good purpose”: be it in slaughter houses; laboratories that turn out cosmetics and household products and pharmaceuticals after dosing animals to death on them; factory farms; abortion clinics; or execution chambers.

It is, however, “a beautiful feature of the Rosicrucian exercises [of retrospection and concentration] that they not only give us spiritual knowledge, but they fit us for having that knowledge” (187). They are spiritually enlightening and morally transformative. Thomas à Kempis has described the right use of knowledge as “only a mystic can do” (188). The motive for seeking knowledge should be “only as a means to the living of a better and purer life, for that alone justifies it” (189).

Heindel seems to moderate his view on the Catholic-Masonic polarity in his later writing, implying more of a rapprochement and assimilation. In the article “Journey Through the Wilderness” (*TI*), Heindel admits that the papacy's authority for interpreting Scriptures has some basis because all but one Pope have had their clairvoyant powers unfolded (191). They had occultly seen and heard, so their pronouncements were the “result of an understanding obtained by means of spiritual vision,” as also were Heindel's (192).

Regarding the Scriptures, not only do the four Gospels contain formulae of initiation, the Old Testament also is “a wonderful book of occultism” (193). Does Heindel intend this term in contradistinction to the word *mysticism*? Definitely, and in

an evaluative sense. The entire Bible is only truly open to “those who have the right to know [and] can unveil what is meant and understand the underlying facts” (193). The mystic may sense or feel the inner truth, but it remains mystical. One can truly know the four Gospels only when the mystical mist is dispelled and the clear truth is discerned. “Likewise in the Old Testament we find great occult truths that become very plain when we can look behind the veil that blinds most of us” (193).

“For the present [many of us] must forego occult sight in order to master the conditions of material evolution....But we of the Western World are now on the occult arc [as in earlier times we were on the mystic—or involuntary—arc]” (193).

Man is the thinker. “It is thought that moves everything, and when we look upon the hidden or occult side of effects, we get a far deeper understanding of causes” (200). And our destiny is to understand, to know—by thinking. So the pot of manna in the Ark in the ancient Tabernacle signifies the Ego, the Human Spirit (166, 200) to which all humanity has access and will use creatively when Aaron's Rod is acquired, which is the serpent power or life force that is lifted up in the wilderness of the physical body to become the Tree of (Regenerative) Life.

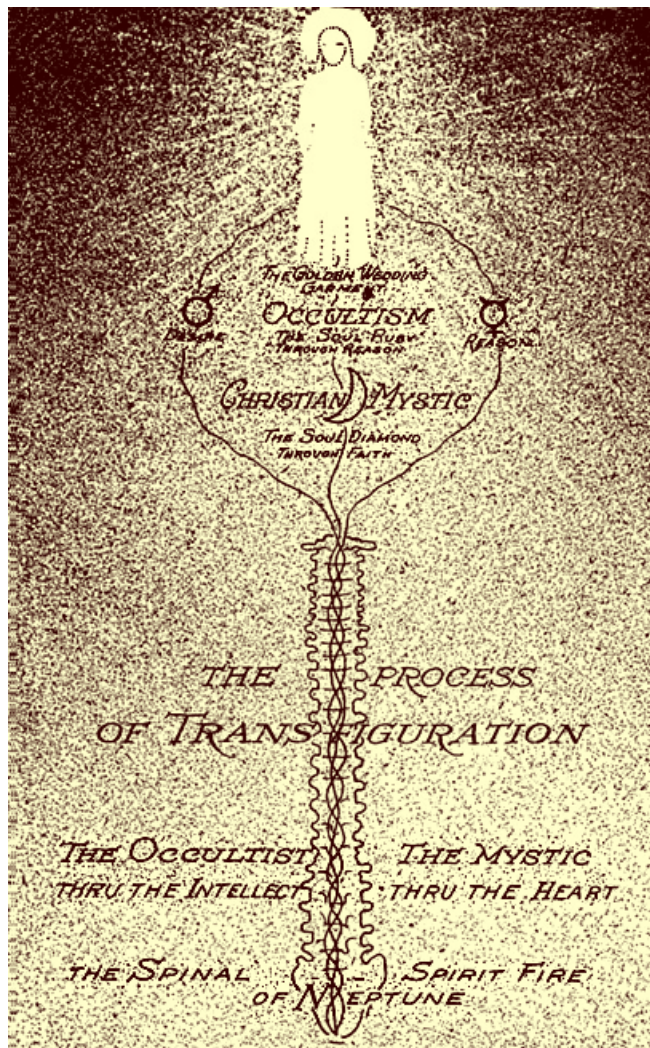
The words *mystery* or *mystical* appear in the title of three of Heindel's shorter works: *The Mystical Interpretation of Easter (MIE)*, *The Mystical Interpretation of Christmas (MIC)*, and *The Mystery of the Ductless Glands (MDG)*. *The Mystical Interpretation of Christmas* is subtitled “Showing the Occult Significance of the Great Event.” This conjunction of the two terms again raises the issue of the meaning the author assigns each. If his interpretation is “mystical,” does this mean it is not rational? If the writer is disclosing the *occult* significance of Christmas, we assume he is approaching his subject scientifically and making an appeal to our reason. A sense of the distinction is given in this text by the phrase “mystic experience,” which points to the subjectivity or personal response to the event. Still, one aims to *interpret* objectively, not subjectively. The illumined mystic sees and feels the Christmas Spirit months before Holy Night, but the occultist can explain, as

Heindel does, what is actually taking place during this same time. Likewise, when the cross is described as a “mystic symbol” (31), we may not know what it means until occultism explains the symbolism based on occult knowledge.

Inasmuch as the ductless glands are foci for vital body processes, they are “intimately connected with occult development” (*MDG* 9), not mystic development. “Occult science” (22) sheds light on the mystery of, or removes the mystery from, the esoteric significance of the ductless glands. We must consider this an advance, for we gain useful knowledge, and applied knowledge, in Heindel’s words, is the only salvation. And the only sin is ignorance (*RCL* 20, 236). Is this simplistic? Are there no other sins? Most certainly, but they can all be accounted for by ignorance; that is, if we *really* knew, in advance, the consequences of intended wrong-doing, we would refrain from such action. What is our lament on viewing past inappropriate behavior? “If I had only known!”

In her forward to Heindel’s *Letters to Students (LS)*, the author’s wife calls her husband a “mystic and occultist” (7). Was he? Here is how he characterized himself: “mystics usually stand aloof from their fellows and the world looks askance at us and our beliefs” (46). *Us* means Heindel regarded himself as a mystic. Aloof he may have felt, but involved in, engaged with, and committed to his fellows he was *in deed*. Recall that Heindel also describes himself as “a Mason at heart” (*F&C* 6), which is set in opposition to the mystic perspective because the latter is faith-based, not knowledge-based.

Were one to assess the relative weight Heindel assigns the mystic as versus the occult perspective, as measured by the frequency of their occurrence (as terms) in his writings, the occult viewpoint predominates—with an 11 to 1 ratio in the *Cosmo*, a 5 to 1 ratio in *Questions and Answers*, Vol. 1, a 4 to 1 ratio in *Christianity Lectures*, and a 2 to 1 ratio in his *Letters to Students*, the latter a highly revealing statistic because it is in his letters that he is most earnest, intimate, and heartfelt. As he acknowledged, his “nice little sermons” from the heart contain “a great deal of occult knowledge” that will benefit the student” (181).



“In the Christian Mystic the regenerative spinal Spirit Fire is concentrated principally upon the lunar segment of the spinal cord, which governs the sympathetic nerves under the rulership of Jehovah...[The Mystic] attains to whole wisdom of the world without the necessity of having to labor for it intellectually....In those, on the other hand, whose minds are strong and insistent on knowing the reason why and the wherefore of every dictum and dogma, the Spinal Fire of regeneration plays upon the segments of the red Mars and the colorless Mercury, endeavoring to infuse desire with reason.... All who are upon the Path, whether the path of occultism or of mysticism, are weaving the ‘golden wedding garment’...the occultist must learn the lesson of deep devotion, and the Christian Mystic must learn how to acquire knowledge by his own efforts...”—A&MI, pp. 99-100

Some of Heindel’s letters describe “the trials that beset the occult student” (175); a number consider the “occult side of the [First World] war” (143). A series of lessons deals with “The Occult Effect of the Emotions” (163). As the Forward to this collection of letters states, Max was continuously

“giving out occult information to his students,” his “occult students” (225), not his mystic students. And whereas the term *mystic* is sometimes used where occult would be equally satisfactory, the reverse is never true. *Mystic* could not be substituted for *occult* without contradicting the intended sense. An instance of the former equivalence is the use of “mystic reason” (65) to explain the use of bell, book, and candle in Catholic liturgy. Occult more favorably couples with *reason* than *mystic*, which does not traffic in reason nor supply explanations. For example, in accounting for the great decline of faith in recent years, Heindel gives not only the “occult reason”, but, to emphasize the facticity and clarity of his viewpoint, he qualifies the first term and proposes to give the “occult scientific reason” (2Q&A 524). Which is to say, when seeking an esoteric explanation, the inquirer does not ask for a mystic answer, which could be more confusing than clarifying.

As the material scientist observes and analyzes forms and processes in the physical world, the “occult scientist easily finds the [deeper or spiritual] answer in the memory of nature” (*Cosmo* 396). On the face of it, the term *mystic masonry* (74), which occurs elsewhere in Heindel’s writings, seems an oxymoron. But he is referring to the symbolic or figurative building engaged in by the Mason, who is concerned with occult development, as in “All occult development begins with the vital body” (title to Letter No. 74). The mystic mason is both building his own etheric temple and, as a prospective living stone, positioning himself in the temple of humanity, the church (ecclesia) of Christ.

For this writer, perhaps the most puzzling occurrence of the term *mystic* is its use in the Fellowship’s subtitle (as it were)—“An Association of Christian Mystics.” It is puzzling because the Fellowship is Rosicrucian and the Rosicrucian path of initiation is the occult, not the mystic, path, as Heindel repeatedly says. We will cite a few examples. While the mystic and occult initiations are “exactly opposite” (2Q&A 228), the Rosicrucian initiations endeavor to blend the two with “perhaps” “a little more stress” laid on the mystic side (*ibid* 229). This passage would seem to

warrant the use of the term *mystic* to characterize Fellowship students, rather than *occultists*. But Rosicrucian Philosophy is a “school of Occultism” (*ibid* 68). “In occult orders, like the Rosicrucian,” musical “keys” or incantations are used. “*The Rosicrucians are the special messengers of Christ to the Sons of Cain,*” representing the occult path, while Jesus is the special messenger to the Sons of Abel who walk the mystic path (*ibid* 447). Are Fellowship students engaged in mystic development? Not primarily, not if they are walking the head path of knowledge and intellect. The Rosicrucian Fellowship is a preparatory school for the “occult order” (502) of the Rosicrucians.

Since “it is necessary to be an occultist in order to study the unexplained laws of nature and the powers latent in man, the Rosicrucians recommend that all thoughts be centered upon living such a life and practicing such exercises as will develop the latent powers in each pupil” (1Q&A 359). Clearly, these are not instructions for mystic development. In fact, knowledge is of little or no concern to the mystic, who is usually “devoid of intellectual knowledge” (*ibid* 290). In the second Letter to Probationers (March, 1911) Heindel advises his students to “give up other occult [not mystic] schools if you aspire to discipleship among the Rosicrucians.”

If the Fellowship student belongs to an association of Christian Mystics “Jesus is his Teacher and his Guide to the kingdom of Christ.” He is “dependent upon the blood of Jesus” (*AMI* 122-123). But this is not the case. The Rosicrucians and Freemasons teach the candidate “to work out his own salvation,” which is “the positive method” (*LS* #29). “The Christian Mystic form of initiation differs radically from the Rosicrucian Method, which aims to bring the candidate to compassion through knowledge [the occult path] and therefore seeks to cultivate in him the latent faculty of spiritual sight and hearing at the very start of his career as an aspirant to the higher life” (*AMI* 67). “Christian Rosenkreuz was given charge of the Sons of Cain, who seek the light of knowledge...[and are prompted] to work out their own salvation” on the occult path; while “the cleansing blood of Jesus is an absolute necessity to millions

of weaker brothers” who tread the mystic path of faith (F&C 97-98).

To become a Probationer of the Rosicrucian Fellowship, the student is advised to “sever his connection with all other occult” orders (*Cosmo* 530). Mystics do not affiliate with occult orders. As previously mentioned, “the mystic is usually devoid of intellectual knowledge,” but Rosicrucian Mystery (!) Teachings are designed to appeal to the intellect by correlating scientific facts to spiritual verities, opening up a materialist perspective, through reason, to spiritual comprehension. Then the heart may be able to believe what the intellect has sanctioned (*Cosmo* 520-521). It is clear that for the more intellectual humanity of the modern era, the emphasis is on rational understanding.

If the Fellowship were an association of Christian mystics, wherein would they differ from Roman Catholicism? It is abundantly clear from the foregoing quotes and references that the preponderant emphasis of the Fellowship teachings is occult: It is Western (Rosicrucian) wisdom whose primary text is *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*. In the *Cosmo* Heindel asserts that the two classes of Egos, the Christians [mystics] and the pupils of all occult schools, are both trying to develop the open heart (303), but, to repeat, “the Christian Mystic initiation differs radically from the processes in vogue among the Rosicrucians in which an *understanding*” is “indispensable” (*AMI* 108).

Why then isn't the Fellowship called an association of Christian occultists? Perhaps because the word for many has strongly negative connotations. Perhaps because, in spite of his own calling and emphasis, Heindel would prefer that it have a mystic identity. The Fellowship's founder increasingly gravitated toward the mystic or heart side during the ten years after the Fellowship was inaugurated in 1909. At the outset he was searching high and low for an occult explanation to life's mysteries. Theosophy was a partial answer, but not the full answer. The Rosicrucian Teachings were, and are. And they are *Teachings*. Mysticism is not taught. Nor do mystics typically seek occult knowledge. Heindel did. And Christian Rosenkreuz had prepared for this contingency. He founded the Rosicrucian Order “with the object of throwing



Redrawn from an early 18th century water color

A Rosicrucian Initiation

Much occult knowledge in symbolic form is contained in this illustration: The regeneration of the earth by Christ's shed blood; the solarization of the planet; the crucifixion of the Divine Man on the cross formed by the intersection of the planes of the ecliptic (sun's apparent path) and the equator.

occult light upon the misunderstood Christian Religion and to explain the mystery of Life and Being from the scientific standpoint in harmony with Religion” (*Cosmo* 518).

One would naturally expect frequent reference to the word *occult* in *Occult Principles of Health and Healing* (OPHH). It is used 25 times. *Mystic* occurs two times. The contrast is yet greater than the ratio indicates because the occult perspective is always assumed when the author explains the invisible causes of diseases and their relation to occult anatomy. Therefore, when Heindel employs

the term *seer*, the word *occultist* could as readily be used because he sees superphysical objects as the scientist sees (with the aid of microscopes, telescopes, and cat scans) physical objects—objectively, and at will. As Heindel explains in *Teachings of an Initiate*, the Elder Brothers of the Rose Cross “lift[ed] the healing art from the sands of experiment to the rock of exact knowledge” because they live consciously in the World of Thought, the world of causes (146). Three characteristic instances of *occult* in *OPHH* follow. “[T]he seven roses upon the cross of the body are intimately connected with the occult development of humanity” (32). It is an “occult maxim that a lie is both a murder and a suicide in the desire world” (61). “From an occult standpoint it is desirable to live as long as possible” (114).

While the reader of Rosicrucian Fellowship literature may be occasionally perplexed by the way in which the two terms of this study are used in the various books, a clear understanding of their respective meanings will permit a sensible reading

in those instances that seem problematic. For example, in the book being considered (*OPHH*), the author begins the last paragraph on page 47 with the familiar statement that “the Western Wisdom School teaches as its fundamental maxim that ‘all occult development begins with the vital body.’” (See also *LS* #74 and *2Q&A* #161.) The two higher ethers constitute the soul body which is “the vehicle of intellect.” Then the paragraph concludes with the same statement, with one word changed: “This is the reason the Western Wisdom Teachings says that all mystic development begins with the vital body.” But if the student is building the soul body, the vehicle of intellect, he is engaged in *occult* development. For this reason Heindel writes that “no occult development is possible until the third part of the silver cord connecting the mind to the liver has been developed,” enabling the Ego, clothed in its soul body, to consciously leave its dense body (*2Q&A* 429-430). The mystic does not take this path. (Continued) □

—C.W.

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By Max Heindel

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