

## *The Mystic and the Occult in Max Heindel's Writings*

### *Part 1*

**T**WO WORDS regularly crop up in Max Heindel's writings. They are at once complements and opposites of each other. *Occult* occurs far more often than *mystic*, and for good reason.

Rosicrucian Teachings are principally occult and not mystic. Moreover, the Rosicrucian Fellowship was founded for the purpose of promulgating occult knowledge, as contained most completely in the *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*. The student may have experienced some confusion with the use of these two terms in Heindel's *oeuvre*. By exploring that use in context we hope to bring clarity both to their intended meaning and to key concepts in the Rosicrucian Philosophy.

Etymology can shed light on the two terms of our study. Both refer to that which is hidden. *Occult* comes from Latin *occultus*, concealed, and the verb *occulere*, to cover over. *Mystic* comes from the Greek *myein*, to shut the eyes. In the ancient mysteries the candidate's eyes were actually opened (either after long sensory deprivation to effect heightened impact of the mystical scene, or, more esoterically, the spiritual vision was opened). In common usage, occultism reveals the hidden while mysticism only refers to the hidden. Heindel

retains this sense: Occultism is a rational presentation, a public showing of invisible or meta-physical truths. It identifies the causes for physical phenomena existing in the world of thought and, importantly, the path by which the invisible worlds can be consciously accessed and known.

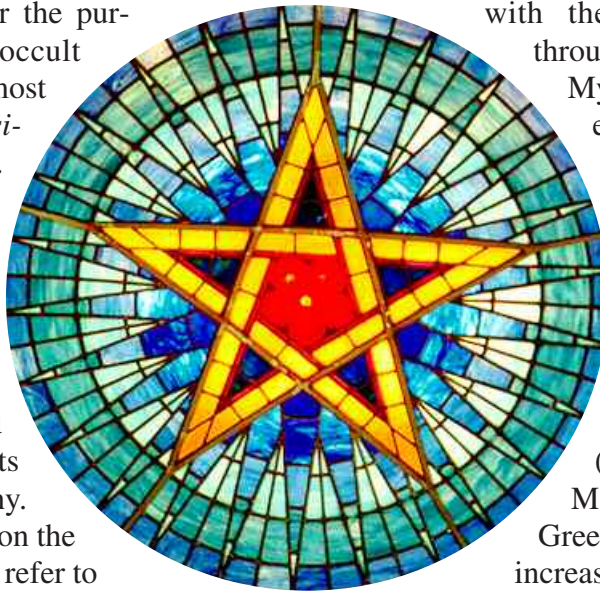
Mysticism describes the path of uniting with the first Cause of creation through faith, devotion, and love.

Mysticism does not seek knowledge per se, it seeks God. It would surpass "mere" knowledge, however lofty. It wants total immersion in Divinity.

Mysticism, though having its origin in the revelation of higher knowledge in pre-Christian *Mysteria* (Greek, *mysterion*) of Asia Minor, Egypt, and Ancient Greece, during the Christian era it increasingly referred to a state of heightened subjectivity by which the religious seeker attained an ecstatic and ineffable union with the divine Presence. The content of this experience thus virtually defies

transmission.

In occult experiences, on the other hand, the seer retains his ego-awareness when experiencing realities of the higher worlds and is able to give them a form that human reason can comprehend, without having to experience them first-hand.



*This stained glass variation on the Rosicrucian emblem is in the domed ceiling of the Healing Department Chapel. It depicts five roses centered in a gold star.*

Therefore direct experience in the higher worlds is prepared for by studying the occult knowledge derived from those worlds.

Mystic knowledge cannot be taught in this manner; in fact, the term is somewhat of a contradiction, if we understand knowledge precisely as that which can be taught or verbally communicated.

Since the *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* (*Cosmo*) is the Rosicrucian Fellowship's principal and first-published text, we shall consider it first. The word *occult* or its derivatives (*occultist*, *occultism*) occurs 138 times in the *Cosmo*; *mystic* appears twelve times. Clearly Heindel was presenting occult, not mystic, truths, as the first and second editions of the book make clear, for its full title was *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception or Christian Occult Science*. In the third edition, Heindel changed the title to *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception or Mystic Christianity*. That the *Cosmo* is a presentation of occult, not mystic, Christian truths is confirmed by both the book's contents and by many statements made in Heindel's other works, as this study will show.

What is happening here? Why the *Cosmo*'s title change? At this juncture we may surmise that Heindel was concerned about the book's reception. Since *occult* had then, and today continues to have primarily pejorative connotations, Heindel's concern may have been to disabuse potential readers of the book of their prejudiced understanding of the word until they could encounter the substance of the teachings where the use of the term would be self-explanatory and positive. However, the use of *mystic* may confuse some readers and give rise to the belief that the *Cosmo* is a treatise on Christian Mysticism, or is a mystical treatment of Christian truths. It is neither. Its purpose exactly reflects the reason for which Christian Rose Cross founded the Rosicrucian Order in the thirteenth century: to throw "occult light upon the Christian Religion and to explain the mystery of Life and Being from the Scientific standpoint in harmony with Religion" (518).

Is the Rosicrucian Fellowship student engaged in occult or mystic study? The *Cosmo* tells us. Its first sentence in "A Word to the Wise" begins with these words: "The founder of the Christian



One of the two lions flanking the main entrance to the Rosicrucian Fellowship Headquarters (Mount Ecclesia). The sign of Leo represents those ideals humanity aspires to during the time (2156 years) Aquarius is precessing the equator.

Religion stated an occult maxim...." The second sentence begins: "All occultists recognize the far-reaching importance of this teaching of Christ..." In the third sentence Heindel writes that a "new philosophy" is being presented to the world—not a new theology! This is a body of occult facts, not a collection of creeds or avowals of faith for mystic affirmation. The first sentence of the *Cosmo*'s first chapter begins: "The first step in Occultism is the study of the invisible Worlds." This study is made possible by the *Cosmo*. It is an occult study.

The *Cosmo*'s purpose is to shed occult light on "the World-Mystery" (248) so that, as the concluding sentence of the first two editions explains, "faith can be swallowed up in knowledge dedicated to the service of Humanity." The mystic "feels rather than knows" (478). But the "main efforts" of the Rosicrucians "are expended in reaching the intellectually minded, for their need is greater" than the mystics', who travel the heart path (478).

While the mystic intuits the truth of Christ's teachings, "occultists recognize the[ir] far-reaching importance" (5) because they have definite

knowledge that confirms their value. And Heindel is unequivocal in stating that his book merits serious attention precisely because “the only opinion worthy of the one who expresses it *“must be based upon knowledge”* (7). However, the *Cosmo* “is not considered by the writer as...the ultimate of occult knowledge” (8), but he gives it “in order that the heart and the mind may be capable of uniting” (18).

The *Cosmo*’s author has “an unswerving desire, a burning thirst for knowledge,” which is “the first and central requisite the aspirant to occult knowledge must possess,” but with this qualification, that “the supreme motive for seeking this occult knowledge must be an ardent desire to benefit humanity” (22). “Another prerequisite to this first-hand knowledge, however, is the study of occultism second-hand” (23). It is the purpose of the *Cosmo* to make that second-hand study of occultism possible. Occult science is the science of what occurs occultly insofar as it is not perceived in external nature, but in that region toward which the soul turns when it directs its inner being toward the spirit.

Heindel emphasizes the facticity of the *Cosmo*’s contents and the rigor and objectivity of his sources by using the term *occult scientist(s)* thirty times and *occult science* twenty-five times. The *occultist* (used twenty times) “knows” and “sees” what he is reporting on. “The *occult scientist* uses concentration in preference to prayer because the former is accomplished by the aid of the mind, which is cold and unfeeling, whereas prayer is usually dictated by emotion” (463). That is, concentration is more impersonal, and therefore more reliable. However, when emotion is replaced by a mystic’s “pure unselfish devotion to high ideals, prayer is much higher than cold concentration” (*ibid*).

Is the Rosicrucian Order mystic or occult? The formula for making the Philosopher’s Stone “is given in esoteric training and a Rosicrucian is no

different in that respect from the occultist of any other school” (438); ergo, the Rosicrucian is an occultist. Or, again by deduction, if “To the Rosicrucians, as to any occult school, there is no such thing as empty or void space” (247), the Rosicrucians are an occult school. Heindel addresses his readers “as students of occult science” (249). “All occult schools are divisible into seven” (438) and each School or Order belongs to one of the seven “Rays” of Life. Individuals benefit themselves only if they unite with “one of these occult groups, the ‘Brothers’ in which...belong to his Ray” (438).

“The Rosicrucian Order was started for those whose high degree of intellectual development caused them to repudiate the heart. Intellect imperiously demands a logical explanation of everything....Therefore the Rosicrucian purposes first to all to satisfy the aspirant for knowledge that everything in the universe is reasonable, thus winning over the rebellious intellect” (439), enabling further development whereby man may then pass “from faith to first-hand knowledge” (440). The *Cosmo* aims to be logical because “logic is the surest guide in all the Worlds” (440) and is also “the best teacher in any world” (203).

“The purpose of...all the occult schools...is to teach the candidate the art of Self-Mastery” (273). Therefore self-evaluation is critical to one’s development. The practice of correctly judging oneself “is perhaps the [*Cosmo*’s] most important teaching” (112). Self-mastery means to act creatively by using the knowledge of effects which follow causes. For example, the “advanced pupil of an occult school may commence to build his own body three weeks after conception in his mother’s womb” (128).

Occultism need not be thought of as synonymous with heartless intellectualism. Rather “the true and trained occultist” is inspired by devotion when contemplating the revelation of nature’s mysteries, as when chaos gives rise to creation

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(252).

Did Max Heindel consider himself an occultist? For the occultist there is no more question of believing in the Law of Rebirth and Consequence than in believing a rose blooms. “We do not say of these things that we ‘believe,’ we say that we ‘know’ because we see them. So the occult scientist can say ‘I know’ in regard to Rebirth, the Law of Consequence and their corollaries” (147). Facts relating to the postmortem life of the Ego “are beyond dispute or argument to the occult scientist.” They are as certain to him as are physical facts to the material scientist. According to Heindel the purpose of life is (1) to acquire “knowledge of the effects which follow acts” and (2) to develop will, “which is the force whereby we apply the results” of that knowledge (131).

The occult student returns to the school of experience on the physical plane with the ultimate goal of mastering “all the knowledge in the world of sense” (132). The occultist obtains first-hand knowledge of the supersensible world by developing (through concentration and retrospection) dormant faculties within himself (34). But “the first step in occultism is the study of the invisible worlds” (24).

Since “The Rosicrucian Fellowship is composed of students of the teachings of the [Rosicrucian] Order” (251), they must be students of occult science, since the *Cosmo* is “one of the first few fragments of Rosicrucian Knowledge being publicly given out” (*ibid*) and the *Cosmo* is a treatise on “Christian Occult Science”, as stated on the original title page. The title page was changed. The contents were not. And Christian Rose Cross

“founded the mysterious [but occult!] Order of Rosicrucians with the object of throwing occult light upon the misunderstood Christian religion” (518). What was formerly a mystery becomes clear, logical and scientific by virtue of occult explanations.

In the short article “What is truth,” an addendum inserted in the *Cosmo* after Heindel’s passing, the writer refers to Plato’s “mystic intuition” that “God is Truth and Light is His shadow” (707). He also says that John the Evangelist “writes mystically” (708) in the first five verses of his Gospel. Both Plato’s and John’s writing remain mystical *until* they are occultly explained. Heindel the mystic writes of contemplating the progress of light from dawn to dusk, in which he sees “a something beyond description by human tongue, a something that can be felt by the soul” (709). The operative word here is *felt*, feeling. This is not to say the occultist does not have mystic feelings, but he can also understand the principles and powers by which he experiences light. The occult explanation is not equivalent to the experience. That is something unto itself, unmediated, subjective. It can only be known by a comparable experience.

Because *The Rosicrucian Christianity Lectures (RCL)* were written and hand-distributed (in Columbus, Ohio, late 1908) before the *Cosmo* was published, though

they did not appear in book form until after Heindel’s passing, they reflect the same zest, sweep, and some of the same information that is contained in that monumental work. In these twenty lectures the root word *occult* is used 58 times, the word *mystic* is employed 13 times. In Mrs. Heindel’s 1939 Forward, she states that the frus-



**Plato**

*In the classical era, this Greek sage best exemplifies the synthesis of advanced mystic and occult abilities.*

Detail: Fresco, The School of Athens, Raphael (1483-1520), Stanza della Segnatura, Vatican

tration posed by unexplained “mysteries” “have driven millions of souls to materialism and caused them to repudiate the Bible.”

In these lectures Max Heindel explains “the why and the wherefore” of these mysteries—that is, he demystifies them, sheds occult light on them, and makes them reasonable. “Occult science commences its investigations at the point where material science leaves off” (30). It reaches “into invisible world[s] for solutions to problems” (29), asserting “an Invisible cause at the root of all visible phenomena” (29). By doing so in a logical manner “occult science resolves the riddle [read *mystery*] of life” (24), beginning with investiga-

tual occultist.” If the head or intellect rules exclusive of the feelings, he faces a grave danger (288). He “may end in black magic if he pursues the path of knowledge for the sake of knowledge and not for SERVICE. The only safe way is to develop both head and heart” (178). The occultist unfolds along intellectual lines, searching for truth by observation and discrimination. But “before his knowledge can be of the highest use in spiritual unfoldment, he must learn to feel it else he cannot live it. When he has done that, he is both mystic and occultist” (179). This is a key passage in Heindel’s writing. The exercise of retrospection helps promote the ensoulment of occult knowledge. It

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tions of the fourfold ether (49). In particular does the “occult pupil” often begin his investigations by reading the reflecting ether (50). Ultimately “the occult scientist refers all causes to the Region of Concrete Thought” (105).

Heindel wrote that certain New Testament passages are easily understood when properly illuminated by “a knowledge of occult teaching” (327). In fact, the entire Bible is a “mine of occult information” (226). For instance, the life of Jesus can be examined in the light of “occult records” (243). He absorbed “an immense amount of occult knowledge” in the Essene library on the shores of the Dead Sea (244). His father, Joseph, “had devoted himself wholly to the occult path” (243) as we assume Mary had committed herself to the mystic path of perfect obedience and luminous devotion.

We sense deeply that the spiritual scientist in Heindel experiences a kind of intellectual wonder at the effectiveness of the Lord’s Prayer, which he twice calls a “formula.” This is the language of an objective occultist who yet enthuses about “the marvelous wisdom laid down in that simple formula” (308).

Heindel enters a caveat regarding the “intellec-

develops a “power of devotion” and “supplies a feeling for truth which is beyond reason,” and is “of prime necessity to the intellectual Occultist” (181). On the other hand devotion for some “is the line of least resistance and they are apt to become mystic dreamers...dominated by emotion [and] may become subject to all sorts of illusion” (178).

Notwithstanding these cautions, it remains clear that the Rosicrucian student aligns himself with an *occult* order, not a mystic order, as evidenced in the statement, “The Rosicrucians, in harmony with other occult schools, divide each world into seven ‘regions’” (49). The student is told to sever his connection “with *all other* occult or religious orders” (italics added), excepting the Christian Churches and Fraternal orders (189). The purpose of this ruling is not to denigrate “all other schools of occultism” but to husband the aspirant’s energies and to give his endeavors unitary focus, thus optimizing his spiritual development.

As used by Heindel, the term *occultism* means the scientific study of spiritual reality. It can be understood as cognate with “the science of spirit.” It employs modern methods of investigation, as

evolved in the physical sciences, to study conditions and occurrences in the spiritual worlds.

At times Heindel uses alternate terms to designate the Rosicrucian path, including: (1) Western Wisdom Teachings, which were “formulated by the Rosicrucian Order to blend with the ultra-intellectual mind of Europe and America” (*Teachings of an Initiate*, *TI*, 142) and (2) the “Western School of Occultism” (240). Occultism is apocalyptic. It uncovers hidden truths. Rosicrucian occultism imparts a new wisdom principle, which is the *Mind of Christ*, the source of apocalyptic wisdom. This new and true knowledge of the spirit points prophetically toward the future, toward divine becoming, toward Christ forming in each individual.

The pupil of this School of Occultism, the “intellectual Occultist,” finds the exercise of concentration most appealing for the development of spiritual sight, but it is also “of great value to the Mystic, because it develops the faculty he lacks most, namely, reason” (181).

Echoing words in the *Cosmo* (438), Heindel writes that “no one can enter an occult school except the one composed of our brothers from the same ray or Star-Angel from which we have emanated” (171). In another echo of the first two editions of the *Cosmo*’s last sentence, “occult science” teaches us that we have it in our power “to hasten that glorious day when faith shall be swallowed up in knowledge” (24). Faith is the knowledge of things hoped for, until it is displaced or swallowed up by second-hand and then first-hand knowledge. The “occult scientist” is in the process of realizing Christ’s promise: seek and ye shall find” (31).

In these twenty Rosicrucian Christianity lectures the context of the word *mystic* contradistinguishes it from *occult*. Dreams are described as “mystic” (178), as is a parable before it is given an occult, or logical, explanation (187). *Parsifal* is described as a “mystic music drama” (192). The listener *feels* and intuits its truth, though he may not be able to

articulate it. Parsifal himself represents the mystic whose feelings have become aroused and tempted: “One whose feelings are intense is very apt to make mistakes” (286).

If the occultist’s nemesis is heartless reason, the mystic’s pitfall is given by Parsifal’s very name. He is pure, but a fool, ignorant. Knowledge is power, particularly self-knowledge, which Parsifal lacks. It is a “well-known fact [that] ultra-devotional people are exceedingly strongly sexed.” “Intense waves of feeling” can sweep them away (288). Lacking knowledge of their lower nature, they are its pawns.

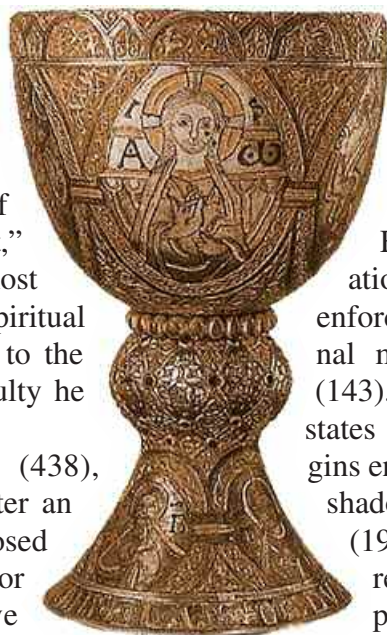
The word *mystic* takes on connotations of incomplete or qualified knowing when used in certain constructions. We are enjoined by Paul and Max Heindel to prove all things.

For instance, a literal seven-day creation of the universe defies reason, and enforcing such a belief works “to the eternal mystification [bafflement] of man” (143). Elsewhere in the lectures Heindel states that the Parsifal legend “has its origins enshrouded in the mystery which overshadows the infancy of the human race” (195), a shroud the occultist attempts to remove, and shadows he seeks to dispel with the light of supersensible wisdom.

The Star of Bethlehem is a “mystic fact,” but the mystery is solved and the facticity is grounded when an occult explanation is provided (257). Likewise is the “Mystery of the Holy Grail” opened to the understanding by revealing the occult ramifications of the use and abuse of the creative force.

Those who were given spiritual truths in the form of myth, symbol, and parable in a prior life, as the Grail Knights were given “picture truths,” “have been prepared for the reception of these truths in an intellectual manner” in a subsequent life. So are concepts “given directly to the intellect” of students of Rosicrucian Teachings, for whom also a mystic preparation preceded this current occult revelation. (Continued) □

—C.W.



**Tassilo's Chalice**

*This Anglo-Saxon Communion cup dates from ninth century England. Christ is shown in benediction with the signature Greek letters alpha and omega on each side of Him.*

York City Art Gallery