

Esotericism, the Occult, and Theosophy

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The study of Western Esotericism is a fairly recent academic discipline. Nonetheless, as obscure a topic as this is to the general public, it plays a vital role in Western intellectual, creative, and spiritual life. The names prominent modern individuals who contributed to and participated in this tradition are too numerous to mention, but W.B. Yeats, Richard Wagner, August Strindberg, Eric Satie, Alban Berg, and Carl Gustav Jung are just a few of the names that come to mind.

The term “esotericism” itself was introduced in European lexicons fairly recently, appearing in 1742 as an adjective (*ésotérique*) in a work by a Masonic author, La Tierce (*Nouvelles obligations et statuts de la très vénérable corporation des francmaçons*).¹ “Esoteric” and its nominal form “esotericism”² are terms that are generally associated with secrecy and secret respectively, and are not surprisingly often synonymous with “occult” and “occultism.” When the term first appears in English (1883) in the title *Esoteric Buddhism*, it is to a Theosophist, A.P. Sinnett, that we give the credit for the English neologism. Yet the meaning is wholly inadequate if we are to understand the entire field of esotericism. One

1 Jean-Pierre Laurant, *L'Ésotérisme* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1993), 12. The noun “ésotérisme” first appears in 1828 (page 7).

2 Which appears in 1828 in Jacques Matter’s *l’Histoire critique du gnosticisme et de son influence*. See *Ibid.*, 40-41.

approach to the subject is to associate or even equate esotericism with **gnosis** “saving knowledge,” a term in its general sense employed to refer to *experiential* rather than rational and doctrinal modes of knowledge, and which, according to Gilles Quispel, one of the leading specialists on gnosticism, is based in imagery. **Gnosis** therefore is an “intuitive knowledge of the true nature of man, God and the world, expressed by mythical images.”³ Furthermore, it refers to an experiential process consisting of a reawakening to the individual’s true nature prior to its being overtaken by “evil.”⁴ In the words of the *Stromata* (7.55)⁵: “Gnosis . . . is a kind of maturing of man *qua* man. It takes place thanks to the knowledge of divine things. . . . Through it, faith is attained and becomes perfect, it being given that the faithful can become perfect only in this way. . . . One must start from faith and, growing in the grace of God, acquire its knowledge as much as possible.”⁶ Gnosis, as salvific knowing, may be interpreted or manifested in a variety of ways: as Gnosticism,⁷ Manichaeism, hermetism, hermeticism, and in the writings of Jacob Böhme, William Blake, and W.F. Hegel to name but a few. Gnosis helps to explain the underlying assumptions of many new and nonconventional religions: the theme of

3 Wouter Hanegraaff, “On the Construction of ‘Esoteric Traditions’,” in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, edited by Antoine Faivre and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leuven: Peeters, 1998): 60

4 *Ibid.*, 20. Evil is a term that may be employed in many ways. It may refer to moral failings, physical or mental afflictions, or to a radical form that goes well beyond immorality or imperfection. One test of the separation between moral failing (to be “bad”) and radical evil may be recognized in the ability to forgive. In its personified form, evil appears in the Abrahamic religions and Zoroastrianism as Satan. One does not find a radical concept of evil in Buddhism, however, despite the equation of Māra with Satan.

5 Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman, *Modern Esoteric Spiritualism* (NY: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1992), 16.

6 In other words, faith is replaced by gnosis, or, to put it another way, faith as perfected no longer substitutes gnosis for hope.

7 **Gnosticism**, unlike *gnosis*, refers to a specific movement in ancient times that manifests gnosis. It teaches a dualistic philosophy comprising two creators: one true, the other false. The false creator, known as the Demiurge, keeps spirits embedded in the world of matter and away from the divine light. That knowledge that can set the spirits free from matter is what is known as gnosis. It is manifested in imagery and symbol

Forgotten Truth, the paths chosen to regain that Truth, and the underlying assumption that we—our true Selves—are capable of returning to our Source: the Divine. Although such religions are labeled as “new” (“new religious movements”), there is little that is novel nor innovative in their teachings; rather, they represent ancient intuitions of the nature of God, the World, and Humanity that permeate not only Western culture but are reflected in other cultures as well. Thus, many of the manifestations of gnosis will appear in reworked form in these nonconventional religions as well as their gnostic underpinnings. *Apropos* the Western cultural tradition, Gilles Quispel is of the opinion that “gnosis,” along with “faith” (as represented by the established churches) and “reason” (referring to the rationalist tradition going back to ancient Greece and taking on modern form in science), comprise the three basic components in the European cultural tradition.⁸

Some commentators view this influence to be dangerous, however. The historian of religions, Carl Raschke, for instance, considers Gnosticism [here used in a broader sense than what is generally ascribed by scholars but never sufficiently defined by him], as an asocial movement in rebellion against time and history.⁹ It manifests itself in a number of movements and individuals spanning ancient to modern times: German idealism, Romanticism, Transcendentalism, New Thought, and National Socialism; for individuals, Carlyle, Schopenhauer, Bergson, Nietzsche, Steiner, Gurdjieff, Ouspensky, and Hesse.

One may also readily detect a prejudice toward Western esotericism in contemporary Europe and America for its perceived heretical teachings (by the Church) and for its supposed opposition to scientific methodology. What is of

and handed down through the ages. Christopher McIntosh, “The Rosicrucian Legacy,” in *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment Revisited*, edited by Ralph White (Hudson, NY: Lindisfarne Books, 1999), 251.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 19. This is found in G. Quispel’s *Gnosis: De derde component van de Europese cultuurtraditie* (Utrecht 1988), 9.

importance here is not only a disagreement by those organizations that subscribe only to reason and/or faith toward gnostic movements but the unstated assertion that gnosis itself as a viable form of knowledge is invalid. It is no wonder that the forces of reason and faith, manifested by science and the Church in Western history, may take a dim view of gnosis-based movements. As such these movements take on status as minority movements with all the attendant connotations that minorities incite in the majority population, ranging from inappropriate, unimportant, threatening—and in its extreme form—dangerous.

The employment of gnosis follows Quispel's understanding of the term as a trans-historical universal. It is as mentioned above similar to or even equated to esotericism. The methodology of Quispel's presentation is somewhat vague, however, so from an academic standpoint a historical approach perhaps presents a more precise and delineated approach. The one scholar who has devoted nearly his entire academic life to the study of esotericism is the French scholar Antoine Faivre.¹⁰ In numerous books and articles, Professor Faivre developed a comprehensive interpretation of Western esotericism, its characteristics, and the currents and notions that comprise the tradition. In Dr. Faivre's words, esotericism "refers to an ensemble of spiritual currents in modern and contemporary Western history which share a certain *air de famille*, as well as the form of thought which is its common denominator."¹¹ Six elements—four intrinsic and two extraneous—constitute this "form of thought." The four essential elements include:

9 *Ibid.*, 37 and 60. This view appears in the book, *The Interruption of Eternity: Modern Gnosticism and the Origins of the New Religious Consciousness*(Chicago 1980).

10 Antoine Faivre has been, since 1979, Directeur d'Études at the École Pratique des Hautes Études, Section des Sciences Religieuses (Religious Studies), Sorbonne, where he holds the chair of the History of Esoteric and Mystical Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe.

11 "Questions of Terminology Proper to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe," in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, 2.

- 1) *Correspondences* between the symbolic and real and between the visible and invisible cosmos (“As above so below.”). Two types of correspondences exist:
 - a) those in nature (between microcosmic and macrocosmic entities such as the planets and parts of the body or those that exist in astrology) and
 - b) those that exist between revealed texts (and history) and Nature such as the correspondence between the Bible and Nature as represented in the Kabbalah.
- 2) *Living Nature* as exhibited through the notion of *magia*, which views Nature as alive “in all its parts, often inhabited and traversed by a light or a hidden fire circulating through it.”
- 3) *Imagination and Mediations*: the former, which allows the use of such intermediaries as rituals, symbolic images, and entities or spirits that “develop a gnosis to penetrate the hieroglyphs of Nature.”¹²
- 4) *Experience of Transmutation*. A transformation or “metamorphosis” is incurred in the individual, what might be termed a “second birth,” in which the knowledge or gnosis and

12 In this regard, Dr. Faivre distinguishes between the “mystic” and the “esoterist.” The former “aspires to the more or less complete suppression of images and intermediaries”; the “esoterist appears to take more interest in the intermediaries revealed to his inner eye through the power of his creative imagination than to extend himself essentially toward the union with the divine.” This appears in his *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: SUNY, 1994), 12.

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the inner experience, the imagination and intellectual activity are united. Such would be the equivalent of the Spiritual Path.

The next two elements are extraneous and incidental to Western esotericism. These are:

- 1) *The Praxis of the Concordance* or the attempt “to try to establish common denominators between two different traditions or even more, among all traditions, in the hope of obtaining an illumination, a gnosis, of superior quality.” Examples include the *prisca theologica* or *philosophia perennis* to such scholars as Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), Agostino Steuco (1497-1548), and the Ancient Wisdom traditions that developed out of the Theosophical Society and also based upon earlier nineteenth century works.¹³

- 2) *Transmission* of the teaching from master to disciple. This incurs a “second birth” through initiation.¹⁴

13 Perennialism or traditionalism also falls under this category. As it develops in the writings of René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, and others, this teaching takes on an ideological metaphysical stance that underlying all religious and esoteric traditions is a “Primordial Tradition.” For further discussion, see Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 14, 35-47 and “Questions of Terminology Proper to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe”: 9. See also Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “Empirical Method in the Study of Esotericism,” in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 7-2 (1995): 110 and “On the Construction of ‘Esoteric Tradition’”: 26-28.

14 *Access to Western Esotericism*, 13-15. Of course, the implication of the transmission of knowledge is that it is valid. Those areas of knowledge and intellectual movements that fall under the Western esotericism are classified in Dr. Faivre’s “Questions of Terminology Proper to the Study of Esoteric Currents in Modern and Contemporary Europe.”

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Those movements or “currents” and areas of knowledge or “notions” consist of the following divisions:

Currents which are not Notions: Hermetism, Christian Kabbalah,
Paracelsism, Rosicrucianism, and Theosophy

Currents which also correspond to Notions: Alchemy, Astrology,
Magic (*Magia*), Occultism, and Perennialism

Notions which are not Currents: Hermeticism and Gnosis.

In Faivre’s system, “Esotericism” takes on the role of a superordinate in much the same manner as does “Gnosis” in Quispel’s analysis. Such is also the case with other terms. Occultism, for instance, is sometimes used in the same manner by some writers in the nineteenth century and even after. It does have more than one sense, however. As an esoteric current in Faivre’s sense, it is an attempt to adapt esotericism to a world that is increasingly materialistic and scientific (i.e. secular). Although Professor Faivre provides a remarkably clear account of Western Esotericism in all its varieties and manifestations, I must stress that the terms as employed by various esotericists are very fluid and therefore inconsistent. Consequently, it is almost impossible to provide precise definitions for many of the notions and currents given above. I have personally found that terms such as Theosophy, esotericism, magic, and occultism, theurgy, and Kabbalah may be employed as near synonyms in some quarters, so any “precise” definition that views the terms as distinct must be viewed with some skepticism. Let us assume, however, that acceptably discrete definitions can be achieved. This is how I would view define the above terms:

Esotericism: a cover term referring to a number of movements and areas of knowledge that reflect certain characteristics (those given by Faivre) that reflect a different worldview and mode of knowledge (i.e. gnostic) from that of the scientific and orthodox Christian.

Occultism: esotericism that is practiced in the form of various areas of knowledge such as magic, alchemy, Kabbalah, and astrology.

Magic: in the sense of *magia naturalis*, “the knowledge and use of occult powers and properties that are considered ‘natural’ because they are present in nature.”¹⁵ Another form of magic, sometimes known as **white magic** or **theurgy** attempts, by incantations, rites, and names establish a link with entities not of this world: spirits, elementaries, divine beings for instance.

We turn now to two later esoteric currents that are especially significant in modern spirituality: **Rosicrucianism** and **Theosophy**. The two currents often coincide not only in definition but also in the identification of participants of the two traditions. Very often, the same individuals are considered Rosicrucians and theosophers without necessarily the reasons for their designation.¹⁶ There is no doubt that the two are interrelated, but as with other esoteric currents, nothing can be explained simply. The more difficult of the two to define is Theosophy because of peculiar development within the two. Theosophy has been interpreted as having two overall

15 Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism*, 66. This is much the way that various nineteenth century esotericists use the term. As such it comes close to modern science in manifestation.

16 Such as Paracelsus (1493-1541), Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), Heinrich Khunrath (1560-1605) or those with both Rosicrucian and Theosophical connections, such as Max Heindel (1865-1919), and A.E. Waite

connotations and usages: the current within Western Esotericism and the Theosophy as portrayed within the Theosophical Society. Dr. Faivre's writes in this regard:

a single esoteric current among others which does not correspond to an official Society; on the other, there is an official Society which has given to itself the title 'theosophical' and simultaneously a programmed orientation. The first major form is an initially amorphous galaxy which began to acquire shape in the spiritual climate of late 16th century Germany, reaching such heights in the 17th century that it has continued to penetrate, with phases of growth and decline, part of western culture until the present day. The second major form is represented by the Theosophical Society itself, officially founded in 1875 at the instigation of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), which has pursued relatively precise directions and goals ever since its inception, (an endeavor incumbent upon any group of this kind), to the point where it is sometimes, rightly or wrongly, regarded as a new religious movement, if not a new religion.¹⁷

The definition that he gives for the theosophical current is as follows:

Theosophy is a gnosis that has a bearing not only on the salvific relations the individual maintains with the divine world, but also on the nature of God Himself, or of divine persons, and on the natural universe, the origin of that universe, the hidden structures that constitute it in its actual state, its relationship to mankind, and its final ends.

17 "The Theosophical Current: A Periodization," *Theosophical History* VII/5 (January 1999): 168-69.

Theosophy in this sense gives a cosmic or “cosmosophic” dimension on Western esotericism.

As a gnosis that sheds light on God, Humanity, and the Cosmos, there is little difference from the Theosophical Society’s interpretation, but there are some interesting observations of the Society’s version that should be mentioned.

First, the chief architect of the Theosophical Society’s interpretation of Theosophy is Helena P. Blavatsky; it must be noted, however, that her view takes on an increasingly different interpretation as her teachings progressed from 1874 to her death in 1891. She and her colleagues considered Theosophy¹⁸ no differently from those theosophers of the theosophical current. This was the view of one of the founders of the T.S., Charles Sotheran, who interpreted it in accordance with the above definition. His immediate source for the meaning of theosophy originated from Webster’s 1875 dictionary, which defines the term in the following manner: “intercourse with God and superior spirits, and consequent attainment of superhuman knowledge by physical processes, as by the theurgic operations of some ancient Platonists, or by the chemical processes of the German fire philosophers.”¹⁹ It was, in other words, a gnosis that had its ancient roots in Greece and in early modern Europe with Paracelsus and his followers, and so very much the same as the traditional theosophers. Also noted is the close identification with theurgy as a practical means of gaining such knowledge. Yet, things change after 1878 when Blavatsky and her colleague, Henry Steel Olcott, left for India. Theosophy takes on a decidedly Vedantic and Buddhistic philosophical flavor. God is no longer personal; the philosophical standpoint of her Theosophy becomes more

18 The term with a capital ‘T’ refers to the Theosophy of the T.S.; with a small ‘t’ that of the current of Western Esotericism.

19 Sotheran was the individual who first suggested the term “theosophy” for the society that was founded in 1875. His lecture on “Ancient Theosophy” was in fact given only four days after the founding of the T.S. on November 17, 1875.

of a qualified non-duality wherein there is no ultimate difference between the Divine, Humanity, and the Cosmos. The South Asian flavor of Theosophy becomes more and more evident in the 1880s culminating in the publication of her *magnum opus*, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888). The teachings contained in this book more or less define the typical Theosophist's perception of Theosophy today. Yet, as an aside, it should be mentioned that this is not the only Theosophical philosophy that exists. There are other Theosophies that reflect more of a Christian bent (Rudolf Steiner and his Anthroposophical Society, or the Christian oriented Theosophy of George Wyld and Anna Kingsford), and later Theosophies that include elements of New Thought (the Saint Germain Foundation and the "I AM" Religious Activity, the Church Universal and Triumphant) that are based partially on Blavatsky's teachings.

These and other developments led me to conclude that the Theosophical Society is not be defined by the term "Theosophy" as it was understood in the nineteenth century but rather the term itself is redefined by Blavatsky and her colleagues. Generally speaking, her teachings on Theosophy are described by the Three Propositions contained in the *Secret Doctrine* and in assorted other teachings that originate chiefly outside the Western cultural arena. The Three Propositions are:

- 1) the existence of an Absolute, Infinite, Immutable Reality or Principle transcending all human thought, conception, and expression;
- 2) the cyclic nature or periodicity of the universe and all therein: a manifestation and dissolution of the numberless Universes, life and death of all living creatures;

- 3) the fundamental identity of the soul with the Universal Oversoul and the pilgrimage of all souls through the cycle of incarnation in accordance with Karmic law.

As for her other teachings that appear in the *Secret Doctrine* and elsewhere, they might be summarized as follows:

- 1) the evolution of the immortal individual continues through innumerable lives, such continuity made possible through reincarnation: the entrance of Self—the trinity of Spirit, Soul, and Mind—into another (human) body;
- 2) the complement of reincarnation is that force, known as the “Law of Cause and Effect (Karma)” that fuels future rebirths and determines the quality of the experience therein;
- 3) the structure of the manifested universe, humanity included, may be viewed as septenary in composition, and cooperative in all relationships;
- 4) humanity evolves through seven major groups or periods called Root Races, each of which is divided into seven sub-races. At the present time, we humans belong to the fifth Root Race, known as the Aryan Race.
- 5) The individual is in actuality but a miniature copy or microcosm of the macrocosm;
- 6) The universe—and humanity—is guided and animated by a cosmic Hierarchy of sentient beings, each having a specific mission to fulfill.

One other element exists in this version of Theosophy. There is the acceptance of an Ancient Wisdom that usually is traced back to Egypt (for

Blavatsky it is much earlier), and is traced through various religions, civilizations and teachers. We know that this concept of a *prisca theologica* or *philosophia perennis* can be traced to Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and to Agostino Steuco (1497-1548) and before that to the thirteenth century *Turba Philosophorum*. From this work is the notion that divine individuals or groups such as Enoch, Abraham, Noah, Zoroaster, Moses, Hermes Trismegistus, the Brahmins, the Druids, David, Orpheus, Pythagoras, Plato, and the Sybils are such representatives. The Perennial Philosophy or the Tradition is a philosophical tradition that comes down to modern times and is found as a metaphysical ideology developed by René Guénon and Ananda Coomaraswamy and continued in such modern writes as Frithjof Schuon.

Finally, the organizations that are based on the Theosophy of Blavatsky include a number of organizations besides the Theosophical Society (Adyar). These include the Theosophical Society (Pasadena), the United Lodge of Theosophists, the Temple of the People, and The Theosophical Society (the Hartley strand headquartered in The Hague), the Word Foundation (based on the writings of the Theosophist Harold W. Percival). We might also include the Alice Bailey groups, including the original Arcane School, the School of Esoteric Studies, Meditation Groups, Inc., and the Tara Center. Closely connected to the Theosophical Society is the Liberal Catholic Church, included derivatives such as the Liberal Catholic Church International, the Johannine Catholic Church, the Liberal Catholic Church (of James I. Wedgwood).

The second current, Rosicrucianism, is closely connected to Theosophy: both the theosophical current and Blavatskian Theosophy. The major difference between the two is not of teaching but of origins. Rosicrucianism makes its appearance with three works, two of which traced to Johann Valentin Andreae (1586-1654). The *Fama Fraternitatis* was printed in 1614 and the *Confessio*

Fraternitatis printed in 1615. The *Fama* introduced Europe to Christian Rosencreuz, supposedly born in 1378, who possessed a secret knowledge derived from Arabia and Egypt and who later founded a fraternity in Germany. In his tomb (he died in 1484) were found magic formulae and secrets of life. The *Confessio* declared that the age of Mercury was at hand, an age when the hidden secrets of the Bible could be discovered. The third work, the *Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosencreuz* (1616) was a novel whose hero undertook a journal expressing in metaphors the marriage of Christ with his Church. The idea of the works was that Rosencreuz received an ancient wisdom which he in turn passed on down to initiated brothers, a teaching disclosing the perfect harmony between micro- and macro-cosm. In addition, Nature itself was considered to be the best “book” wherein God could be comprehended. Unlike the theosophical current, the Rosicrucian current can be traced to these works and to the fraternity expressed therein.

Yet there are similarities. Both Rosicrucianism and theosophy are interested in the theosophical speculation that can be traced to Paracelsus. Nature is ordered and classified by God, and so knowledge of God can be revealed through Nature. In a sense, Rosicrucianism adopts that form of philosophy which is known as “pansophy” (which combines theosophical and Rosicrucian teachings) as understood by Jan Amos Comenius.²⁰ We might say, therefore, that theosophy was more concerned with divine illumination, a gnosis about God through the myth or revealed truth, whereas Rosicrucianism would know God through Nature.

²⁰ Pansophy combined two notions of theosophy: “Wisdom by divine illumination and Light from Nature.” The second may be considered to be appropriated by Rosicrucianism. Jan Amos Comenius’ definition of “Pansophy” is the one that generally understood. This is summarized by Faivre: “a system of universal knowledge, all things being ordered and classified by God according to analogical relationship. Or . . . a knowledge of divine things acquired via the concrete world, i.e., the entire universe, in which the “signatures” or hieroglyphics must first be deciphered. In other words, the Book of Nature helps us understand better Holy Scripture and God Himself.”

One other contribution is introduced in Rosicrucianism, and that is the mention of initiatory, secret, societies, all based on the fraternity founded by the mystical Rosenkreuz. Such is the origin of Freemasonry and the notion of the Masters of Wisdom, the Mahatmas, the Great White Brotherhood, and other Theosophical designations that were made famous by Blavatsky and her successors within the Theosophical sphere. Furthermore, we know that Bulwer-Lytton's novel, *Zanoni: A Rosicrucian Tale*, may have been the basis of the later Masters in Theosophy and other movements and organizations. Much of Theosophical teaching is based upon the teachings of Rosicrucianism as understood in the 1870s. These included Hargrave Jennings' book, *The Rosicrucians*, and the article of HIRAF in the *Spiritual Scientist* of 1875 entitled "Rosicrucianism," to which Blavatsky replied in her "first occult shot," that is, her first significant publication on the subject of esotericism. So the connection to Rosicrucianism and early Blavatskyan "Theosophy" is beyond doubt. Central to the HIRAF article is the notion that Rosicrucianism and Rosicrucianists are the lost wisdom and the apostles respectively: "To regain this treasure, long lost by humanity, we must study the seers who gathered it, gem by gem, and coin by coin. Of that web, from the looms of the Nile, the power is Ain-Soph,—the Cabala is the gospel, and the Hermetics or Rosicrucians the apostles and the masters." And in conclusion is the significant statement: "The Rosicrucian becomes and is not made."

Herein is the significance of the Rose Cross. As Christopher Bamford wrote, it represents a way, something that one must do.²¹ One must conjoin the Cross and the Rose: the Cross of Christ signifying the renunciation of self to redeem the world; the Rose referring to the Christ in all, the center of all things. Combined, the Rose Cross is the symbol of purity, of renewal, of transformation.

²¹ *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, 46.

By the time Rosicrucianism enters the modern world, it takes form in a number of movements. In the U.S. the most famous organization is the Ancient and Mystical Order of the Rosae Crucis (San Jose), founded by H. Spencer Lewis (1883-1939). It is in this school that the idea of an ancient Wisdom is retained through mystery schools going back to Egypt and Solomon and including Isaac Newton, Rene Descartes, and Benjamin Franklin. Again, the emphasis is on transforming oneself. Because Lewis was interested in the mysteries of the ancient world, especially Egypt, the city of San Jose became the beneficiary of a wonderful Egyptian museum established at A.M.O.R.C. headquarters

Another organization is the Rosicrucian Fellowship founded by Max Heindel, which is presently located in Oceanside, California. Heindel encountered a Master who imported the Ancient Wisdom, some of which is written in his most significant work, *Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception*, a book on Nature from the esoteric Christian tradition.

Another group is the Fraternitas Rosae Crucis of Quakertown, Pennsylvania. This was founded by Pascal Beverly Randolph (1825-1875), one of the most interesting men of the 19th century who was only recently rediscovered by the general public when a biography came out a few years ago by a close associate of mine, John Patrick Deveney. One prominent name in this organization includes R. Swinburne Clymer. Teachings on alchemy, reincarnation, karma, the heavenly hierarchies are emphasized.

In conclusion, there can be no doubt that the influence of both ancient and early modern ideas and movements had had a profound affect upon a significant number of modern and nonconventional movements. Because the worldview of the currents and notions that comprise esotericism is based neither on reason nor faith as significant means of ascertaining reality, but on gnosis, this latter form of

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knowledge is accepted by neither the dominant forces in our society: science and the Church. It is little wonder that movements based on this form of knowledge are considered “deviant” by mainstream society. This notion of deviancy underlies the attitude toward sects and cults, the subject of the next talk that examines deviancy to the extreme within “dangerous cults.”