
MARTINIST INITIATION

by

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One of the most familiar ways to start discussions among Martinists is to ask the question "What is a Martinist?". The answer to that can be as elegantly simple or as convoluted and complex as the participants wish. The notion of "Initiation" is common if not central to this question and to those regarding "Martinist Legitimacy". Let's start with a broad definition for the present, then gradually color in some details. "Martinism" is the Christian Mystical philosophy based upon the books and letters of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin. The definition of "Christian Mystical" is itself worthy of a lengthy book such as *_Mysticism_* by Evelyn Underhill, a classic in the literature of religious studies. Evelyn Underhill was at one time a member of an authentic Golden Dawn Temple under the author A. E. Waite, in England and supposedly not unfamiliar with the practical application of her subject. The Golden Dawn was, and still is, an organization dedicated to the study of Magic and other Occult practice. In general, a Christian mystic is someone who is deliberately performing the virtues expressed by the life of Jesus Christ to the best of his or her ability. This is a pretty expansive definition. There are many pious Christians who are mystics and don't know it. Generally however, the Christian mystic, indeed the mystic of whatever religion, engages in a spiritual discipline over and above the everyday religious observances. These spiritual disciplines are similar to what monks and nuns would perform, that is, deep prayerful communion with God, in other words, meditation. This gives rise to another suitable definition of a mystic: A mystic is one who seeks to raise his or her consciousness for the purposes of greater attunement with God. Doing this within a Christian environment makes one a Christian mystic. Definitions more specific than these are beyond that suggested by Saint-Martin in his published writings.

During his lifetime (1743 to 1803), Louis-Claude de Saint- Martin founded no group or fraternity for the study of the higher mysteries of religious experience. Remember that during this era, the French Revolution had transpired and the so called Holy Inquisition was passing its last days. Public indulgence in too controversial activities could have put him in prison to await the guillotine or the stake, depending upon which authorities, Church or State, to which he ran afoul. As it was, as a nobleman, he was imprisoned for a short period during the Revolution, but released upon the intercession of local officials who sought to employ him as a public school teacher. Saint-Martin engaged in personal correspondence and meetings with like minded, spiritually inclined people. In addition to letter writing and visiting friends in France and other countries, he set out his inspirational thoughts in several books. He was probably influenced by the pious religious life books of his era, especially that of Saint Frances de Sales, Bishop of Lyons, France and Doctor of the Church (1567-1622). Saint Francis de Sales' book *_Introduction*

to the Devout Life_ , published in 1619, is a model for a Christian mystical way of life. Uncorrupted for the first 10 years after his death, the body of Saint Frances de Sales rests at the Mother House of the Visitation Order in Annecy, France, near Paris.

The greatest self-admitted influence upon Saint-Martin were the books of the German mystical philosopher Jacob Boehme. Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin was the first to translate Boehme's works from German into French. There is evidence in his published letters, that he was acquainted with occult subjects of his time like spiritualism, magnetic treatments, magical evocation and the works of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Although contemporaries, no written correspondence exists between Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin and Emanuel Swedenborg, nor even a reference to same. Saint-Martin did not marry and did not have any children.

Both before and after his death, circles of admirers of Saint-Martin's works spontaneously formed for the purpose of discussing and perhaps practising his philosophy. These were generically called "Friends of Saint-Martin". Let us now abruptly enter the main issue of this essay, that of Initiation. The most detailed chain of succession or apostolic succession, as it were, is given by the Ordre Martiniste of Paris, France:

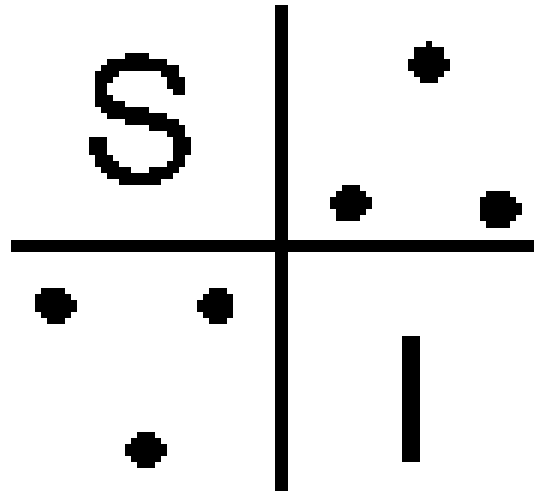
1. Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803)
2. Abbe de la Noue (died 1820)
3. Antoine-Marie Hennequin (died 1851)
4. Henri de la Touche (died 1851)
5. Adolphe Desbarolles (died 1880)
6. Marquise Amélie de Boissmortemart
(born Amélie de Nouel de la Touche)
7. Augustin Chaboseau (died in 1946)

There is a parallel succession:

1. Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin
2. Jean-Antoine Chaptal (died 1832)
3. Henri Delaage (died 1882)
4. Gérard Encausse (ie. Papus, died 1916)

In 1888, Augustin Chaboseau and Gérard Encausse exchanged personal Initiations to consolidate the succession. Other than the names of Saint-Martin, Chaboseau and Encausse, the other

persons are mostly only names to us. How does one proceed from informal circles of Saint-Martin aficionados, of which these names must belong, given the vacuum of additional information, to the notion of an Initiatic Chain of succession? By Papus' own admission, "All that I received were some letters and some points." This is a cryptic reference to the symbol, invented by Papus, called the Martinist "Labarum" comprised of the letters "S" and "I" and opposing equilateral triangles represented by three dots each, all within the four quadrants of an equilateral cross:



It is believed by many Martinists, but never admitted by Saint-Martin in any of his books or letters, that he was a member of a Rosicrucian fraternity called the "Rose-Croix de L'Orient". The English translation of "Rosy-Cross of the East" is unsatisfactory, however. I believe the reference is to the Rosicrucian Order known in English as the "Asiatic Brethren", which has been described with some approval, by A. E. Waite in his book *The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross*, an important reference text in Rosicrucian study. This Rosicrucian Order was contemporaneous with Saint-Martin. It is known that Jacobe Boehme himself had acquaintance with students of Alchemy during his writing career and additionally was visited by members of the Rosy Cross late in his life.

Further it is known that Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin was an Initiate of the highest degree of a Christian Magical or Theurgic Order called the *Élus-Cohens Chévalerie des Maçons de l'Univers* (Elect Priests Knight Masons of the Universe). As a former Mason and theurgic Initiate, it is believed that Saint-Martin performed a simple personal Initiation upon his students, something like the laying on of hands, nothing elaborate. No public proof is available that anything of this kind transpired, neither from the pen of Saint-Martin nor from any of his admirers, who numbered in the thousands throughout Europe. It cannot be overstressed that Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin never claimed the possession of any Secret Wisdom or supernatural abilities. Notwithstanding his silence upon the level of his own spirituality, the inspired tenor of his works and indeed of his very life, and that he freely admitted to success in his theurgic operations, it is not unreasonable to conclude that a certain *magisterium* or sacramental grace emanated from his

being. The names listed in the Martinist succession, then are presumably documented individuals who have received this personal and informal "touch" or "transmission" as it is called in Martinism, from person to person.

In 1891, the Martinist Order was founded in Paris, France, by a Supreme Council containing:

1. Papus (Grand Master)
2. Chaboseau
3. Paul Adam
4. Barlet
5. Maurice Barres
6. Burget
7. Chamuel,
8. Stanislas de Guaita
9. LeJay
10. Montiere,
11. Joseph Peladan
12. Sedir

Maurice Barres and Joseph Peladan were later replaced by Marc Haven and Victor-Emile Michelet.

For completeness sake, I will complete the succession, at least until 1971:

1. Papus (died 1916)
2. Charles Detre (ie. Teder, died in 1918)
3. Jean Bricaud (died in 1934)
4. Constant Chevillon (assassinated by the Vichy Milita in 1944) 5. Charles-Henry Dupont (died 1960)
6. Philippe Encausse (retired in 1960)

7. Irénée Seguret (1971-?)

Other Martinist Orders deriving from Papus:

1. Papus

2. Victor Blanchard (died in 1953. Grand Master Ordre Martiniste et Synarchique (OMS), founded in 1918)

3. Agustin Chaboseau (died in 1946. Grand Master Ordre Martiniste Traditionnel (OMT), founded in 1931)

4. Joules Boucher (died 1955. Grand Master Ordre Martiniste Rectifié founded in 1948)

5. Ordre Martinist Initiatique, founded in 1968, Christianne Buisset Grand Master circa 1980-?)

The Martinist Order of Paris (OM) eventually became the largest body of regularly initiated Martinists until the Second World War.

The OMS continued only in Switzerland during World War II. Eventually it ceased its works there, but an OMS jurisdiction in England continues to the present day (1994). About the year 1960, the Canadian Jurisdiction of the OMS unilaterally became autonomous, and operates on its own in several Provinces of Canada. The Mother jurisdiction of the OMS does not recognize the Canadian Order as an OMS body, considering it clandestine, although properly in possession of Initiatic authority. Further discussion of the Canadian OMS awaits more badly needed historical material to be furnished by the Sovereign Grand Master (or other authorities) of the OMS in Canada. The OMS is regularly active in the United States of America under a Charter from the OMS in England. More information about this U.S. body is urgently required from authoritative sources.

In 1947, the OMT, or TMO as it is more commonly known in English, was dissolved when the succeeding Grand Master, Jean Chaboseau failed to be approved by the Order's Supreme Council. The TMO continues presently under the American Jurisdiction of the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC). The largest number of Martinists in the world are of this obedience, due to the correspondence school methods employed by this Rosicrucian Order. Initiation by mail is not practiced or recognized by any Martinist Order or group. Instruction by correspondence has not been approved by most, but not all authentic Martinist Orders, however, A. E. Waite in his book *The Unknown Philosopher* notes that instructions were sent by mail under the Grand Mastership of Papus.

Several additional Martinist Orders presently exist, working on a small scale and ultimately descending from the previously mentioned organizations, not all of whom are recognized by the main Martinist bodies nor each other.

The perceptive reader will note that from a tenuous anecdotal claim of an Initiatic Transmission (of what exactly?) a tendency, even from the earliest history of the Martinist Order of Paris, of

groups splitting from the main line of Parisian Martinism, has been the rule, not the exception, that being a consolidation of the Martinist Order of Lyons under Henry Dupont with the Martinist Order of Paris under Philippe Encausse. Since then, the "of Paris" is no longer used nor required.

The Martinist Order in general is organized on the Lodge System, something like Freemasonry, although no effort is made to encroach upon its symbols and teachings. After having been found sincere and desirous of study of the principles of the Order, a candidate successively progresses through three Degrees or Grades: Associate, then Initiate, then Unknown Superior. The education is given in person during meetings called Conventicles. A simple ritual of opening and closing the group called a Heptad (7 members minimum) or a Lodge (21 members minimum) is employed. Smaller groups called Circles with a very simplified opening and closing ceremony, permit less than the minimum to study the Martinist principles.

The Degrees of Martinism, and I will roughly equate Martinism with the Martinist Orders, for the present, as this is the commonly held conception among Martinists, really are an unfolding of, or preparation for, the Third Degree. According to Papus, "There is only one Degree, that of S. I.". S. I. stands for Supérieur Inconnu, in French. The Initiations are a kind of baptism designed to stimulate the member's ascent upon the mountain of Wisdom, so to speak. The Conventicle lessons are a framework of sympathetic study designed to allow that spark to fan into a flame. At this point, gentle reader, we are at the point of an inference (a baptism-like consecration) that has been placed atop a hearsay anecdote (the transmission of a personal touch or blessing). The nature and efficacy of the Martinist Transmission in and of itself, is largely an issue of faith. The noticeable effect of Martinism, however, exists in the participation in group study and personal practice of a mystical way of life. The Lodge system provides a psychological environment to encourage the perception and appreciation of higher spiritual principles. It is presumed that after the Third Degree, upon which official study terminates, the Martinist is fully capable of continued self-study and practice and indeed is prepared to lend a helping hand in charity and philanthropic service to the rest of humanity.

I have explained, with some diversions, how the Martinist Orders came to be, and the generally accepted basic description of a Martinist Order's organization with respect to its Initiations. It can be discovered by comparing the current Martinist lessons' material to the actual writings of Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin, that a substantial amount of Occult concepts and principles are being taught as "Martinism", the nature of which may or may not have met with the approval of Saint-Martin. This has led to a diminution of the mystical element, the primary one, in Martinism, and an amplification of related Occult or secondary principles. We can observe what Martinism is now, as exemplified by the various Martinist Orders. This fosters the question "What is Martinism supposed to be, ideally?". Can it meet its own ideals? How will it evolve in the future? How should it evolve? Comments and questions to the author are invited.

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This contains the article *Saint Martin the French Mystic*_ by A. E. Waite

10. "L'Initiation", official journal of L'Ordre Martiniste

Mailing Address: 6, rue Jean Bouveri, 92100, Boulogne Billancourt, France. Subscriptions are available to anyone but are in French only. 11. The FUDOSI, a special publication by AMORC in 1946. Only one edition was ever made.

12. Personal documents from decades of study and practice as a Martinist.

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