

Ordo Templi Orientis



FRATERNITAS LUCIS HERMETICÆ

Some Frequently Asked Questions

Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law.

Please note that this FAQ deals very briefly with some extremely complex topics, and as such leaves out many nuances, exceptions, and interesting details. We strongly encourage those interested in O.T.O. and Thelema to conduct more thorough research to gain a more complete understanding of these issues.

Questions about Ordo Templi Orientis (O.T.O.):

How old is O.T.O.?

By tradition, O.T.O. traces its spiritual origins to the foundation of the Order of Knights Templar in 1108. More historically, its immediate antecedents (according to Aleister Crowley) were the 18th-century Rosicrucian Orders. The initial conferences that actually led to the formation of O.T.O. as a modern organization were held in 1895 in Europe. These conferences led to the launching of *The Oriflamme*, a journal that would later become the official journal of O.T.O., in 1902. *The Constitution of O.T.O.* was published in 1906, and its *Manifesto* was first issued in the U.S.A. in 1919.

What is Aleister Crowley's relationship to the O.T.O.?

Aleister Crowley was admitted to the O.T.O. in 1910. He was appointed national Grand Master X° for Britain and Ireland in 1912, and assumed worldwide leadership as O.H.O. (Outer Head of the Order) in 1922. He completely revised the Order's rituals and structure, conforming them to the Law of Thelema.

What is the difference between O.T.O. and M.:M.:M.:?

M.:M.:M.: (Mysteria Mystica Maxima), was originally established as the British section of the O.T.O. under Crowley as National Grand Master. As currently understood, M.:M.:M.: represents the aspect of O.T.O. that administers the initiatory degrees of O.T.O. from 0° (Minerval) through VII°.

How is the Gnostic Catholic Church related to O.T.O.?

Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica (E.G.C.) or the Gnostic Catholic Church, was incorporated into the O.T.O. structure in 1908. Crowley wrote the Gnostic Mass (Liber XV) for the E.G.C. and O.T.O. in 1913. The E.G.C. formally accepted the Law of Thelema in 1920. As currently understood, the E.G.C. represents the aspect of O.T.O. that administers the Gnostic Mass and associated ecclesiastical rituals.

Is the O.T.O. a "Secret Society"?

O.T.O. is a California tax-exempt, not-for-profit, religious corporation. It does hold the details of its initiatory rituals and initiatory documents to be secret, and it considers the identity of its members to be private and confidential. O.T.O. policy requires it to comply with all applicable laws of the jurisdictions in which it operates.

Do I need to be a member of the O.T.O. to participate in the Gnostic Mass?

Membership in O.T.O. is not a pre-requisite for attendance at the Gnostic Mass, in most locations. The Gnostic Mass is generally referred to as "the central ritual of the O.T.O. both public and private" and often serves as a contact point for those interested in finding out more about the Order and its practices. Some local bodies do prefer to have some kind of initial contact before inviting new individuals to attend the Gnostic Mass. It is also generally expected that those attending the Gnostic Mass participate in the eucharist offered at the end of the ceremony. We encourage those interested in attending the Gnostic Mass to familiarize themselves with the text of the ritual (*Liber XV*) before deciding whether to attend.

Is Ordo Templi Orientis Satanic or anti-Christian?

O.T.O. makes no claims or representations to be either Satanic or anti-Christian. We find that these characterizations serve no real purpose in describing what we are about, or our vision for humanity. Rather than being anti-Christian, we are in fact pro-Thelema: we support the Thelemic ideals of freedom of religious and personal self-expression; emancipation from superstition and social oppression; and the development of a world view which supports and encourages the age-old vision of the Universal Brotherhood of mankind.

Do your rituals involve animal sacrifice?

None of the initiation rituals of O.T.O. or ecclesiastical rituals of E.G.C. involve animal sacrifice in any way. No O.T.O. member is ever required by O.T.O. to perform or participate in animal sacrifice. However, O.T.O. takes no moral or religious stand against the practice of animal sacrifice, per se. Animal sacrifice is an ancient and legitimate religious tradition that has historically been practiced by many established religious systems, including Classical Paganism, Judaism, Islam, and many African and Afro-Caribbean religions.

What is the relationship between Ordo Templi Orientis and Wicca?

O.T.O. is not a Wiccan or Pagan organization. However, O.T.O. membership is not incompatible with Wicca or Paganism. Gerald Gardner, who is commonly credited with establishing modern Wicca and coining that term, was deeply influenced by Crowley's work and was an initiate of O.T.O. A number of members of O.T.O. also consider themselves Wiccans.

What is the relationship between Ordo Templi Orientis and Freemasonry?

O.T.O. was originally associated with certain European rites of Freemasonry, but long ago separated itself from Masonry altogether. For further information, please see our history and initiation pages on the O.T.O. U.S. Grand Lodge website. O.T.O. membership is not incompatible with membership in most Masonic organizations.

What is the relationship between Ordo Templi Orientis and the A.:A.:?

O.T.O. has long worked in close alliance with the A.:A.:, which first proclaimed the Law of Thelema to the world. The A.:A.: is a teaching and initiatory system dedicated to the personal spiritual advancement of its individual members. Within A.:A.: all services are rendered free of charge, and no social activities are held. O.T.O. and A.:A.: have jointly issued the journal *The Equinox* since 1912e.v., and currently in its fourth volume. Although they are distinctly separate organizations, O.T.O. has historically assisted A.:A.: with practical matters that lie outside its primary mission, which is purely spiritual in nature.

Is O.T.O. a religion ?

No. O.T.O. is a religious organization and magical fraternity that works within the wider context of the spiritual philosophy known as Thelema, which technically could be considered a religion.

Do members of your Order practice "black magic"?

"Black magic" is commonly conceived as a type of "sorcery" or "diabolism" intended to cause harm to other beings. Crowley's conception of "black magic" represents a refinement of this common understanding of the term: he defined black magic as magical work which does not serve the aspirant's True Will; and he also held that it could not be the True Will of any being to oppose the True Will of another. The spiritual practices of O.T.O. are intended to enhance the lives of its initiates, not to harm anyone. No one is instructed by O.T.O. in curses, hexes, or any other kind of magic designed to harm another person. Further, in his classic work *Magick Without Tears*, Crowley defines the three distinct "schools of Magick" as being yellow, white and black, yet posits these schools in a very different way than what one might first imagine; and the Magick practiced by the Black School is distinct from either conception of "black magic" described above. O.T.O. encourages a thorough understanding, by its members and non-members alike, of the definitions of the three schools as given by Crowley.

How do I join O.T.O.?

This question is answered at length on our membership page of the U.S. Grand Lodge website (<http://oto-usa.org/member.html>). To summarize, initiate membership requires a physical ceremony, which in turn means that you must find and contact an O.T.O. local body near you to apply for initiation. The U.S. local body or international contact pages on the website (<http://www.oto-usa.org>) may be useful in locating the closest local body in your vicinity.

Do I have to believe in some particular dogma to join?

If you decide to pursue full membership, as a 1°, you will be stating that you accept the Book of the Law as written, without wishing to change it. Even in the Minerval degree, you will be making a commitment in the strongest terms to uphold the ideals of freedom set forth in the Book of the Law. However, how you interpret the Book of the Law and its significance is largely up to you.

I'm a [Buddhist|Wiccan|Catholic|Baptist|Druid|etc.]. Can I stay one if I join the O.T.O.?

O.T.O. does not impose restrictions on members' beliefs, or on their affiliations with other organizations that do not attempt to infringe on the rights and operation of O.T.O. However, higher-degree members are expected to avoid allowing their participation in other groups to unduly limit the time and energy they can devote to their O.T.O. obligations.

Will I learn Magick in the O.T.O.?

The principal purpose of O.T.O. within the Man of Earth Triad is to administer the Mysteries (initiation rituals) and the ecclesiastical rites of the E.G.C., not to actively teach any particular system or practice of Magick. However, properly understood, these rituals offer significant instruction themselves, in the form of allegory and symbolism, that is of both practical and theoretical value to the serious student of Magick. In order to assist initiates to discover and understand some of the lessons of their initiations, U.S. Grand Lodge issues degree-specific self-study guides, which are provided by the local bodies to members on their initiation to each degree. In addition, many local bodies offer introductory classes, seminars, practical workshops, and instructional and reference materials on a variety of systems and techniques of Magick, traditional and non-traditional, as well as on such related topics as Qabalah, Yoga, meditation, divination, mythology, symbolism, and comparative religion.

Why does O.T.O. charge dues?

Financial support is necessary to run a large multinational organization, even one staffed by volunteers. Our financial records are open to members.

What do I get for my dues?

Order members receive national and international newsletters, which are typically published on an irregular basis. In addition, being dues current entitles you to attend initiations and other events that are only open to members in good standing. It allows you to apply for initiation to the next degree, as you feel ready to advance. It gives you the prerogative of sponsoring other applicants for initiation, once you are a 1° or higher yourself.

Questions about Thelema and Aleister Crowley

What is "Thelema"?

This question is answered at length in our "About Thelema" section on our website at: http://www.oto-usa.org/about_thelema.html. In brief, Thelema is the religious-magical-philosophical system founded when Aleister Crowley received the Book of the Law in 1904. Its principal tenets can be summarized by the brief phrases, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law" and "Love is the law, love under will."

What is a Thelemite?

The term "Thelemite" is subject to several different interpretations. The term itself was coined by Francois Rabelais in 1534 e.v. Crowley used the term to refer to someone who "accepts the Law" (i.e., the Book of the Law) and actively works within the Three Grades of the system of Thelema. Herein, we follow Crowley's usage.

How do I become a Thelemite?

By deciding that you are a Thelemite, and accepting the Law of Thelema. Accepting Liber AL as a spiritual and magical focal point is implicit in this idea, in the sense that it would be paradoxical to claim to be practicing Thelema without this acceptance. What you do beyond that is entirely up to you ("Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law"). There is no requirement to join any particular organization, to associate with (or shun) other Thelemites, or to follow any specific course of study, meditation, or ritual practice. Many Thelemites do find that membership in a Thelemic organization proves useful in furthering their own Work. There are numerous such organizations to choose from, with O.T.O. being perhaps the largest and best-known among them.

What if it's your True Will to do [some bad thing]?

This is the philosophical puzzle at the core of Thelema, and like most puzzles, it resists easy solution. One school of thought considers "Do what thou wilt" to be a descriptive rather than a normative law, similar to the distinction between the speed-of-light limit imposed by the physical nature of the Universe and a posted highway speed limit. Given that your having carried out a given act indicates that you both intended it to occur and successfully made this intention manifest, it is evident that you have conformed to the laws governing such actions; q.e.d. The other school argues that the Law should be seen as a goal to be achieved, and that it is very possible to act against your (true) Will. In this view, it is posited that were all to do their own Wills and nothing else, there would be no strife.

If I may inject my own experience, I have found that both views appear to be 'true' in differing situations and for different purposes. In many ways this debate is similar to (perhaps even the same as) the debate over predestination and free will; however intriguing the possibility of the former, in practical reality it feels like I have free will, and in the end, for practical purposes, that is what matters. Much the same argument can be applied to the descriptive and normative senses of the Law of Thelema. —C.B.

Was Aleister Crowley a Satanist?

Aleister Crowley was a systematic and scientific explorer of religious practices, techniques, and doctrines. As such, he performed devotional exercises to Satan as well as to Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, to various deities from the Egyptian and Hindu pantheons, to Jehovah as well as to Allah, and to the divine personifications that are unique to the system of Thelema. At one time or another Crowley was an Atheist, a Polytheist, a Monotheist, and a Pantheist, a Satanist and a Christian, a Hindu Yogi, a Hebrew Qabalist, a Muslim Mystic, a Buddhist, and a Pagan. In 1904, he became the Prophet of the New Aeon and the founder of the religious magical, and philosophical movement called Thelema, through his reception of *Liber AL vel Legis*, the Book of the Law.

Did Crowley really sacrifice children?

No. Crowley never performed or advocated human sacrifice. His much-quoted allusion to frequent "child-sacrifice" (*Magick In Theory & Practice*, Chapter XII) was a metaphor for a specific practice of sexual magick that did not involve harm to any individual, but diverted the energies of sexuality from physical reproduction to other purposes. The 'child' or 'Bud-Will' that is sacrificed in such a practice is a particular manifestation of the magician's Will, and not a physical, human child. Human sacrifice in any form would be incompatible with the principles of Thelema, as a violation of the right of every individual to live as he or she wills.

How do you pronounce 'Thelema'?

One hears both "thuh-LEE-muh" and "teh-LAY-muh" commonly, and other variants now and then. The original Greek is Θελημα. This word is pronounced "teh-LEE-mah" in modern Greek, and would have most likely been pronounced "teh-LAY-mah" in ancient (Attic) Greek—so take your pick.

What does the "e.v." I see after dates in Thelemic writings mean?

Thelema has its own calendar, but at present it is used largely for ceremonial purposes. In common with many religions, for many practical purposes we use the Gregorian calendar instead. In Christian practice, the years after the traditional birth of Christ are identified as "A.D.," or "Anno Domini," which means "Year of Our Lord." Scholars wishing to use the Gregorian calendar without that sectarian attribution adopted the practice of using "C.E.," short for "Common Era," instead. Some used the Latin equivalent, which is "E.V." ("Era Vulgaris"). Crowley established the tradition of using the latter form when referring to Gregorian dates in Thelemic materials, and this tradition has been maintained into the present day.

What does "93" mean?

The old Hebrew and Greek languages had no separate system of numerals; numbers were instead signified by the use of the letters of their respective alphabets, each of which had a specific numeric value assigned to it. Therefore, a numeric value can be derived from any word or phrase spelled in either Greek or Hebrew. The study of these numeric values and their meanings is termed "gematria". The Greek words Θελημα (Thelema — Will) and Αγαπη (Agape — Love) both enumerate to the number 93. Therefore, the number 93 serves as a concise, symbolic expression of the principles of Will (Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the Law) and Love (Love is the law, love under will). Crowley recommended the use of these phrases as Thelemic salutations of greeting and departure; modern Thelemites frequently use "93" as a shorter and more casual equivalent.

Should you have any further questions about O.T.O., Thelema, Aleister Crowley or related subjects, please feel free to address them directly to the Public Information Officer care of the U.S. Grand Lodge website e-mail address at: pio@oto-usa.org or to a representative of the local O.T.O. body in your area.

Love is the law, love under will.