

Understandings of The Thelemic Order

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Preamble

Throughout history the One Gnostic Catholic Church has been manifest in various forms in times and places. We believe that in order to bring about a more perfect understanding of Thelema suitable to the New Aeon, and to promulgate that understanding among the people, new manifestations of this Church must be accomplished.

The State of Thelema

There has been in the past half century an unfortunate state within the body of Thelema. While most of the adherents of the largest of Thelemic bodies are sincere and decent people, there are Thelemites with wide ranging international reputations, both within and without various organized bodies, who have indulged, and at times embraced, ideals which conflict with the basic precepts of Thelema, most notably white supremacy, misogyny, homophobia and transphobia. This has resulted in Thelema, the doctrine of tolerance, being associated with ignorance and intolerance. At the same time some of these same individuals have worked pro-actively to marginalize others who do not conform to their model of Thelema.

The result is that Wicca, and Satanism, and numerous other fruits of the ideological explosion after the Second World War and in the 1960s, are more widely admired in the world today than Thelema. While we are glad for this, and see nothing wrong with it, we believe Thelema has a great deal to offer if it can be moved to take its place at the table.

The Thelemic Order is a Thelemic body organized along principles of the New Aeon, discarding vestiges of the old. It aims to provide an unparalleled ground for the expression of individual interpretation and the practice of magick, while refusing to indulge intolerance in the name of tolerance.

What are the Understandings?

We will never all agree on everything.

What does it mean to be:

“In Principal Sympathy with the Understandings?”

It is a paradox of intellect that the more completely and coherently a set of beliefs or understandings is expressed the less likely it is to gain adherence, as there will always be some small thing which rankles and keeps each individual from completely accepting it.

At no point do we ask for that anyone embrace the understandings as a matter of blind faith, or be completely in agreement with every word of them.

After all, the understandings themselves may be changed by Members through a variety of mechanisms.

- By “principal” we mean “first” or “of the highest order.”
- By “sympathy” we mean “understanding between people” or “commonality of feeling.”

So by “Principal Sympathy” we mean *“Primarily having a feeling of support for and comprehension of the ideas behind the understandings and for the greatest or most part.”*

Are the Understandings definitions of Thelema?

No, they are understandings of our shared Thelemic Community, a basis for establishing a shared space for us to learn together.

The Principles

Love is the Law, Love under Will

We believe that the word of the Law is θέλημα, or Thelema, which comes from the Koine Greek and has an especial meaning in which will, desire, and purpose are united as one. We convey a part of that meaning in our unique and specific application of the word “Will.”

We believe that Will is informed by Love.

Crowley said “Love is easily counterfeited. Lo, while in the Book of the Law is much of Love, there is no word of Sentimentality. Hate itself is almost like Love! Fighting most certainly is Love! ‘As brothers fight ye!’”

It is among our understandings and principles that the use of love within Thelema is not ironic, as in the Orwellian slogan "Love is Hate," but rather conveys a sense of passion and willingness to struggle, the details of which every individual must understand for themselves.

We understand that if Love were intended only as a hollow rubber-stamp upon selfish passion, it would not be so prominently framed as that which informs and is by-product of, Will. The absence of sentimentality does not also mean Love needs be bankrupt of compassion. The exploration of Love through ἀγάπη, or agape, and its other expressions is necessary to inform Will and therefore is the study of Love the study of Will.

Light, Life, Love and Liberty

We understand that the expression of Light, Life, Love and Liberty. We consider among other meanings:

- Light as the light of Gnosis
- Life as the value of every star among stars
- Love as the true informant of Will
- Liberty as the inherent freedom of every star in the company of stars, however we abjure every facile interpretation of Liberty which is inconsistent with the grant to every Star among Stars of the Rights of Man.

Magick

I hope the above principles will demonstrate to ALL that their welfare, their very existence, is bound up in MAGICK.

- Magick in Theory and Practice (being Part III of Book 4) - Crowley,
Waddell

There is no "Thelemic system of Magick." Crowley through his teaching and instruction make it clear that the study of all magic was appropriate, and perhaps vital. Notably he heavily incorporated principles from Hatha Yoga in which he was instructed by Alan Bennett.

To a great extent we see the function of The Thelemic Order as a gateway to the exploration of Magick.

Liber OZ - The Rights of Man

We uphold the Rights of Man (or “humankind,” as the term was meant in 1941 and in the earlier work from which it was adopted) as a basic expression of the rights of humankind and the definition of honoring Life, as they inform us of how we should relate to every Star among Stars.

We also apprehend that the Rights of Man must be exercised with due regard to consequence.

We understand that these Rights were not proclaimed with the intention of creating a nihilistic system in which each person preys upon the other, taking what they can without regard to the commonweal, and that such interpretation would result in anarchy, ruin, and desolation.

We reject any vision of these rights which is based on fundamental and systematic iniquity, whereby through outright slavery or slavery by circumstance, including intentional impoverishment, some are restricted from enjoying these rights with the intention that others may enjoy them with less fear of consequence.

Sin

We understand that the word of sin is restriction.

We differentiate restriction, in which limitations are involuntary, from discipline in which limitations are accepted voluntarily in order to achieve some good.

We observe that “to restrict oneself” and “to restrict another” are equally sin, therefore we reject any system by which we may become more free of restriction for ourselves, but only by placing restrictions upon others.

We observe further that the concepts of restriction and intolerance are linked.

We are infinitely tolerant, save of intolerance.

- The New Comment on Liber AL vel Legis, II:57

To tolerate is to “allow the existence, occurrence, or practice of, without interference.”

To interfere is to restrict. Thus the statement above could be paraphrased:

We restrict nothing, save placing restrictions

We understand that catering to the intolerance of another is not tolerance, but restriction.

Aleister Crowley

We accept the importance of Aleister Crowley, particularly when he writes about the *Book of the Law*, and those things which pertain to Thelema.

Crowley himself did not claim to have “invented” Thelema, but gave broad credit to Rabelais, as its preceptor or at least oracle. In practice, whatever the supernatural basis for the dictation of the *Liber AL*, Crowley’s interpretation of it shows numerous influences historical and contemporary. As well, his ideals changed, and were influenced by, the events around him. Concepts of Thelema continued to evolve, for better or worse, both during Crowley’s lifetime and after his death.

We view Thelema as a living branch of Western thought, inspired and informed by, but neither originated from, or ending with Crowley or his revelation.

Crowley, throughout his life, stressed self-examination, questioning, and disbelief. If we are to pursue Thelema as a living concept we may treat Crowley as a principal source, but must also be informed by our own understandings, and learning, as well as methods and principles, which did not exist in Crowley’s time, or were opaque to him.

Additionally, but perhaps most critically, we do not regard Crowley’s words, particularly when speculative, or straying far afield from the topics with which he was best acquainted, as infallible.

Practices

The One Gnostic and Catholic Church

There is One Gnostic Church of Light, Life, Love, and Liberty. As this Church has always and will always exist, and any organization of the peoples embracing its principles is a manifestation of that Church. We neither claim sole title to, nor do we dispute the validity of other manifestations of, the One Gnostic and Catholic Church.

The Role and Ordination of Clergy

Thelemites have never believed that there is some special quality, conferred through external ordination, without which the participation of an individual in Mass or other religious ceremonies is moot. Ordination within EGH constitutes a matter of respect, a recognition of devotion and training, and the conferrence of authority within the denomination.

We value ordination both as a tradition by which the Light of Gnosis may be transmitted down through the aeons, and as an act of personal transformation or initiation which may have transformative power.

We uphold the independence of Clergy and acknowledge that the appropriate role of Prelates or Bishops is guidance and teaching, not restriction and rulemaking. In regards to the interpretation of doctrine we are infinitely tolerant, save when that doctrine is a matter of intolerance.

Ordination within EGH may confer one or more lines of Apostolic succession, however this is not the principle focus of selecting individuals specifically for ordination within EGH.

Heterodoxy

“Heterodox” is the opposite of “Orthodox” and embraces Nonconformism.

It is noteworthy that Nonconformism, as an intellectual movement, has a long history. In the English-speaking countries it is associated most heavily with the rejection of the Church of England. While many nonconformists faiths seem dated, narrow, or intolerant to us today, they were radical in breaking down layers of hypocrisy, essentialism, and social injustice, prevalent in their era.

Nonconformism gave rise to two waves of intellectual movements in England, and to a lesser extent in its former colonies, among which were the Plymouth Brethren, among whom Crowley was raised. While he rejected much of the Brethren doctrine regarding sin and deity, their mindset, including a deconstructive attitude toward dogma and doctrine, shows a clear influence on his thought and work.

Thelema is, appropriately, a heterodox practice as both in Crowley and Rabelais it rejects conformity with many accepted beliefs and instead encourages the individual pursuit of intellectual and spiritual truth.

Uniformity of Ritual

There is no comma in the line “Let the rituals be rightly performed with joy & beauty!” (Liber AL, II:35). TTO holds that the only “right” way to perform rituals is so that they evoke joy and beauty in all participants.

Individuals may have strong feelings about what is “right,” and are welcome to try to convince others, but not to coerce, or use positions of authority in TTO to coerce.

Not everyone wants to innovate or create new rituals. TTO supplies “official” rituals as an aid to Clergy, to give them solid material to work with. There is no requirement to adhere to the “official” versions, and they are revised on an ongoing basis.

Works and Promulgation

We hold that there is no merit to claiming some sublime inner truth when it is neither radiated outward with intensity, nor cultivated inwardly with passion.

“Success is thy proof: argue not; convert not; talk not overmuch.” Liber AL III:42

Any manifestation of the One Gnostic and Catholic Church shall be known and valued by its works, by the way in which it achieves success in bringing the light of Gnosis and the Law of Thelema to the People.

“What I need is efficiency in promulgation” (Crowley to Fr. Achad, June 1916.)

We understand in Promulgation a prohibition against all those matters of increase in the membership of a body of faith which rely on coercion, with that replaced by demonstration.

We seek to promulgate by demonstrating the spread of Light, Life, and Liberty.

- by our understanding of the complexities of Love
- by our excellence of community
- by our mastery of Magick

We do not hesitate to explain Thelema in a fashion that is straightforward, nor do we seek to wrap it in mysteries to make ourselves appear important. Our aim is to make the Law and all mysteries around it, as accessible as possible. "The work requires the cooperation of tens of thousands of people...they have to be addressed in language which they can understand." (Crowley, August 1936)

Protection of the Mysteries

We recognize that we live in a different world than that of the early 20th century. Where the idea of a link between sexuality and religion was heretical and socially unacceptable, it is now widely represented in music and mass entertainment.

Many of the structures which were erected in order to "protect" the unenlightened from apprehension of the mysteries assumed an unwillingness of the vast majority of the population to accept concepts which we now very nearly take for granted. Likewise there are new and greater apprehensions of the "mysteries" as they existed in the late 1940s.

It is incumbent upon us to create easy and accessible paths to the mysteries which allow for a graceful learning curve not to shroud them in layers of further mystery in order to trump up our own importance or protect a position of authority.

Respect for our Membership

It is not our job to constrain and trivialize philosophers or magicians who may come to this Organization well experienced from other Thelemic Groups or from the presence of the Thelemic current in modern society, and compel them to heel beneath a hierarchy which exists principally to perpetuate itself.

Therefore we will treat every member with respect and provide reasonable and rapid access to all of our mysteries.

Likewise each member shall be allowed to write, criticize and campaign as they see fit. We shall not enjoin them from expressing opinion on any matter of doctrine or magick. The value of each member's opinion shall be determined by the test of criticism and discussion, not by the arbitrary rulings of some theoretically enlightened body.

Unity and Harmony

In regards to unity, it is expected that those who undertake, voluntarily, to promulgate Thelema through The Thelemic Order enjoy some harmony with its basic concepts, particularly those regarding tolerance.

In general the reasons for expulsion from this Order, individually or en masse shall be limited to these:

Gender

The issue of gender has been a source of much division and question in modern society. We believe that the right of every individual to define their own gender and sexuality flows from the Right of Man, of humankind, to think and love as they will.

It is an article of practice that this church shall make no rules nor establish rituals in which the individual expression of gender is restricted and that the statements of a sibling in regards to their gender are not to be subject to examination or regulation.

To cater to one person's fear or disgust regarding the gender expression of another is to tolerate intolerance.

Broad Intolerance

“We are infinitely tolerant, save of intolerance.”

— Aleister Crowley, New Comment on II 57, Liber AL

Within the framework of tolerance we can entertain very great difference of opinion, however this does not obligate us to accept intolerance as having the same merit as all other values and ideas. We do not tolerate:

Nonconsent

Nonconsent is an Intolerance of the personal sort in which the will of others is suborned without regard.

Dishonesty in an Official Capacity

Using our shared resources in a dishonest fashion, particularly financial misconduct.

Destructive Intent

We are not obliged to tolerate actions which are bent on the destruction or the subversion of the values of these articles in order to change them beyond recognition by internal or external mass action, and may part ways with those who join with those intentions.

Freedom of Association

The majority of the Local Bodies of the Order are those in which individuals have come forward to offer their space to the community.

Most Local Body Masters are hosts, and maintain the freedom to choose not to associate or invite into their space other Members with which they, or their immediate circle, have issue. That said, there is an official process through which this must be expressed, and this does not apply to bodies operated by TTO directly.

Politics

In our era social policy and politics are intertwined

We are *apolitical*, however we are *social*, and the decision of a political party or group to impose social constraints does not make those matters “political” thus somehow placing them beyond our scope.

This order is socially progressive only to the extent that movements generally identified as progressive are in keeping with honoring the rights of all individuals. We part company when any of those movements wish to restrict the rights of individuals in the name of uniformity.

We recognize, broadly, the social concept of balance, and the need of some who have great fortune to sacrifice some of their plenty that others may have the basic resources they need to complete their work.

We recognize, broadly, the need to prevent state, ecclesiastical, or social hegemony whereby one group is able to constrain and control the freedoms of another through no particular merit, with no object other than their own aggrandizement.

In all matters we are guided by the need to balance the welfare of the individual against the welfare of the many, and cautious of any doctrine or method which suborns the one to the other. To this end we may on one hand struggle against the curtailment of individual liberty and personal choice while on the other we may find ourselves fighting systems in which the individual is institutionally aggrandized beyond reasonable proportion, or in which some individuals are given exceptional protections or privileges without regard to merit..

The Business of the Order

We uphold that the acceptance of the divine light of gnosis does not convey any especial insight into matters of administration, and the management of the people and affairs of the Church or Order. For this reason it is an article of our faith that the Leadership, Discipline, and Administration, outside of matters of faith, shall fall to its secular leadership, who are chosen from among the Peoples on the basis of Merit, by mechanisms fair and transparent.

Democracy is an imperfect mechanism, and works best when moderated, however we have not observed that absence of democracy has conferred any especial success on those Thelemic groups which have most strongly embraced hierarchical authority.

If it seems remarkable that we allow our General Assembly the highest voice within the Order, we may consider: our Lord and Master may be the Sun, but the sun is, itself, only one Star in the Company of Stars. Those stars, when they come together, are more powerful than any single sun. There is no part of us which is not of the Gods, and our Assembly, together, is the convocation of the Gods, more powerful than any Heirarch.

The Acceptance of these Understandings

No human expression is perfect. It is sufficient to be in principal sympathy with these Understandings

Further Discussion of the Understandings

These elements are not part of the Understandings, but rather observances and commentary on them.

Readings of “The Rights of Man”

A Discussion of The Right to Kill

Throughout history many faiths have used war, weapons of war, and acts of violence as visceral symbols for all struggle. Those faiths such as Jainism which are truly pacifistic are rare. Some faiths are open about their embrace of violence, while others encode it as a “special circumstance.” Christians may condemn Islam for embracing *jihad* on one hand, yet appeal to the Augustinian principle of “just war” to rain death upon their own enemies.

Because of the potential for the Right to Kill to be interpreted wrongly, either as a call to libertarian violence, or a commitment to anti-social behavior, it requires special attention and explanation.

We uphold this right which is embedded, from Aristotle through Augustine, in Western thought. The concept of just war as an ultimate response to extreme iniquity and the eclipse of life and freedom has been accepted by most peoples. Even among many pacifists, the necessity to use force in defense of basic rights is widely, though not universally, accepted.

The Right to Kill does not imply an affinity for violence, but rather a constraint against violence. Where Aristotle upheld the right to war in order, in some circumstances, to enslave others, we are taught that the only basis for violence is the defense of our own rights, or by extension those of others. Thus we share the values of most modern, free, peoples in believing that the ethically valid reason for violence is defense of the basic rights and dignity of all peoples against those who would deny them.

While we accept the possibility of engagement in just war, and do not embrace a strictly pacifist ethic, we acknowledge also that the Right to Kill is principally a **metaphor for all struggle**, and that physical violence falls at the extreme end of a wide range of action which will more usually and appropriately be expressed through some **non-physical struggle, mental, emotional, legal, political, or economic**.

The Slaves shall Serve

"The Slaves shall Serve," has been a problematic line, often used by those ignorant of the core concepts of Thelema to justify a thuggish and brutal approach in which the rights of those other than themselves are held at naught.

The meaning of *Liber AL* is a matter of personal interpretation, however we believe the specific quotation of the line "The Slaves shall Serve," at the end of *Liber Oz*, by Aleister Crowley writing as himself, quoting his inspired work, is not beyond analysis.

Crowley confuses the matter, often writing offhandedly of slaves or "those who should be relegated to the slave-class." In his defense, he includes, by inference, not the poor but "those parasites of society who feed upon the troubles caused by Restriction: officials, lawyers, financiers, and the like." It is equally clear this usage is as much polemic as practical construction of his Thelemic society.

Crowley was, especially at the end of his life, an opponent of democracy. During his life Democracy brought David Lloyd George and the horrors of the Somme, and Adolf Hitler. He was neither a fan of Fascism and wrote poetry critical of Mussolini. It seems likely that slavery in "the Abbey imagined by Rabelais, and to be realized by the Master Therion," is largely a self-imposed constraint, slaves who forge their own chains in ignorance and refusal to embrace the freedoms offered by Thelema.

Whatever Crowley's thoughts he lived in an era when slavery of sorts, particularly debt slavery and the repression of indigenous peoples, was still socially acceptable. An irrefutable product of the dawn of the new Aeon is the understanding involuntary slavery of any kind is unacceptable, and there is ample basis in the principles of Thelema for rejecting the idea that this body of Thelemites, or any other, should or is entitled to make literal slaves of others, or that in a metaphorical sense it is righteous to exploit the unenlightened.