

## THE 'OCCULT MACROHISTORY' OF ALEISTER CROWLEY

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Howbeit we know after a time there will now be a general reformation, both of divine and human things, according to our desire, and the expectations of others. For it is fitting, that before the rising of the sun, there should appear and break forth Aurora, or some clearness, or divine light in the sky - *Fama Fraternitatis or a Discovery of the Fraternity of the Most Noble Order of the Rosy Cross*<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine is conveyed, as is customary among Initiates, in the form of a parable. Those who have attained even a mediocre degree of enlightenment are aware that the crude belief of the faithful, and the crude infidelity of the scoffer, with regard to matters of fact, are merely childish. Every incident in Nature, true or false, possesses a spiritual significance. It is this significance, and only this significance that possesses any philosophical value to the Initiate. – Aleister Crowley, *Magick without Tears*<sup>2</sup>

The life and work of Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) has until recent times “been almost ignored by academic scholarship” and “largely ignored by the historians of religion.”<sup>3</sup> If among his contemporaries Crowley had a reputation as ‘bad, mad and dangerous to know’ and for his students was ‘one hell of a holy guru’ then we should not be surprised. No doubt his philosophical marginality and sexual outlook (an ‘unholy trinity’ of sodomy, masturbation, and ‘solar phallicism’<sup>4</sup>) account in part for this neglect. In equal measure these same qualities make his work of increasing interest and fascination to scholars mapping the cultural, social and ‘occult’ transitions of the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Fama Fraternitatis’ in Yates, F. (1975) *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. St. Albans: Paladin. p.294.

<sup>2</sup> Crowley, A. (1991b) *Magick without Tears* [abridged edition], ed. Regardie, I. rpt. Scottsdale, AZ: New Falcon, p.66

<sup>3</sup> Urban, H. (2003) ‘Unleashing the Beast: Aleister Crowley, Tantra and Sex Magic in Late Victorian England’ *Esoterica* V(2003): 138-192

[[http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeV/Unleashing\\_the\\_Beast.htm](http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeV/Unleashing_the_Beast.htm)]

(last accessed 17 June, 2003)

<sup>4</sup> See Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> See for example Urban, H. (1997) ‘The sorcerer and his apprentice: Aleister Crowley and the magical exploration of Edwardian subjectivity’ *Journal of British Studies*. 36(1997): 99-133. Urban argues that Crowley “is of profound importance for the understanding of modern western spirituality and culture as a whole.”

Faivre identifies the 'occult' as a counter-current to the "triumph of scientism."<sup>6</sup> As a broad historical trend occultism sought to integrate scientific progress and modernity with elements of the Western esoteric tradition that had been developed prior to 1860.<sup>7</sup> In Crowley this project manifested in a system of 'scientific illuminism' he named 'Magick.' Under this rubric Crowley sought to unite the 'illuminist' techniques of the East (yoga) and West (ceremonial magic). Both were to be undertaken in the spirit of scientific experimentation. Moreover, this magical science was based in a revealed philosophy that Crowley held was scientific and hence universal, fulfilling the hopes and dreams of esotericists since the Renaissance.<sup>8</sup>

The word 'occult' inasmuch as it means 'hidden' carries with it the implication that those same hidden things, be they secret truths or orders of reality, can also be sought and found. J.P. Deveney in the preface to his biography of influential nineteenth century 'Rosicrucian and sex-magician' Paschal Beverley Randolph, describes this narrative in terms of "the disappointed expectations" of the occultist.<sup>9</sup> The disappointed seeker of the occult does not deny the reality of that which has been sought but rather sees it as more hidden. For Deveney the continuing spatial ("the idealisation of peripheral peoples") and temporal ("true wisdom is always primordial wisdom") recession of wisdom is a major aspect of occult thinking. Occultists hold that these secrets are not only "removed in space and time" but also hidden by "secret masters and *superieurs inconnus*."<sup>10</sup> While it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore this rich phenomenon in any detail, these 'secret masters,' known to Crowley

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<sup>6</sup> Faivre, A. (1994) *Access to Western Esotericism*. New York: SUNY. p.88

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. p.88

<sup>8</sup> Compare Ibid, p.58-59

<sup>9</sup> Deveney, J.P. (1997) *Paschal Beverly Randolph: a nineteenth-century Black American spiritualist, Rosicrucian, and sex magician*. New York: SUNY. p.xxiii, gives this a firm existential basis, "The 'guru' is revealed as merely human; the projection of the philosopher's stone fails; the mediums message is discovered to plagiarised or simply a rehashing of platitudes"

as the ‘Secret Chiefs’ or ‘Great White Brotherhood’ have an intrinsic role to play in Crowley’s occult macrohistory.

In that occultism presents a worldview in which humans are “at least potentially, central figures in the unfolding of the cosmic drama,”<sup>11</sup> occult thinking can be seen as inherently macrohistorical. That is to say it is a particular act of “re-imagining one’s place in the cosmos and ‘the whole course of events.’”<sup>12</sup> This paper describes Crowley’s ‘occult macrohistory,’ his own re-imagining of the cosmic drama.

Crowley, like his occult peers and antecedents embraced “the radicalism of the ‘evolutionist assault.’”<sup>13</sup> As in the other occult ‘re-imaginings’ of Blavatsky and Steiner the idea of evolutionary progress is for the most part embedded in Crowley’s macrohistory. Crowley’s accommodation with the ‘evolutionist assault’ made extensive use of the evolutionist anthropological theories of J.G. Frazer. The work of Frazer permeated Crowley’s understanding of religion. It is beyond the scope of this paper to fully explore the extent and nature of the relationship between Frazer and Crowley’s ideas. It is important to note though that Crowley understood the work of Frazer as an important scientific basis to his own work.<sup>14</sup> The great esoteric theme underlying Crowley’s work was the Rosicrucian ideal of individual and social renovation or redemption “by means of a universal spiritual science,” an ideal

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<sup>10</sup> Deveney (1997) op. cit. p.xxii

<sup>11</sup> Deveney op. cit. p.xxii

<sup>12</sup> Trompf, G.W. (1998) ‘Macrohistory in Blavatsky, Steiner and Guenon’ in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*. eds. Faivre, A. and Hanegraaff, W. Leuven: Peeters. p.269

<sup>13</sup> Trompf (1998) op. cit.274

<sup>14</sup> Frazer’s theories also appealed to Crowley’s strong ‘anti-Christian bias.’ Growing up in a sect of strict Plymouth Brethren Crowley had clear ‘issues’ with Christianity. This and the fact that he had strong background of Biblical knowledge forms an obvious background to his imagery and claims as the Great Beast. Though not explored in this paper the way in which he read his own mission in terms

conveyed to him in the initiatic system of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Evolutionary progress and the Rosicrucian redemption are important themes in Crowley's work and the tension between them is of consequence in his macrohistorical vision.

Over three days in April 1904 CE, Crowley received auditory communications from a 'praeterhuman' intelligence who identified himself as "Aiwass, the minister of Hoor-paar-kraat."<sup>15</sup> This communication, each of its three chapters dictated to in the space of an hour, comprises *Liber Al vel Legis* or *The Book of the Law*. This book had profound significance in Crowley's life. In his 'autohagiography' he writes,

My entire previous life was but a preparation for this event, and my entire subsequent life has been not merely determined by it, but wrapped up in it.<sup>16</sup>

The three chapters of the book overflow with prophecy, poetry, codes and ciphers. The book proclaimed Crowley the "prince-priest the Beast," and announced him as a prophet of a new Law whose reach would be universal;

We may then regard this talisman, the Law, as the most powerful that has been made in the world's history, for previous talismans of the same type have been limited in their scope by conditions of race and country. Mohammed's talisman, Allah, was good only from Persia to the Pillars of Hercules. The Buddha's, Anatta, operated only in the South and East of Asia. The new talisman, Thelema, is master of the planet.<sup>17</sup>

*Liber Al vel Legis* announces this new Law in a direct allusion to the *Festival of the Equinox* ceremony of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn;

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of the Book of Revelation does have macrohistorical implications and of itself is a fascinating area, eg. *Liber Al vel Legis* is rich in Biblical allusion.

<sup>15</sup> *Liber Al vel Legis* – The Book of the Law I: 7 in *Ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> Crowley (1989) op. cit. p.393

<sup>17</sup> Crowley (1997) op. cit. p.218

Abrogate are all rituals, all ordeals, all words and signs. Ra-Hoor-Khuit hath taken his seat in the East at the Equinox of the Gods ...<sup>18</sup>

The Festival of the Equinox was a neo-Masonic ceremony that twice a year enacted a change of ritual officers and ‘abrogated’ “the present password.”<sup>19</sup> The Festival of the Equinox was held to herald “the initiation of a fresh current” creating a magical link between the Order and the Sun.<sup>20</sup> Crowley took this reference as cosmic in scope, the announcement of a new spiritual dispensation.

The initiatic system and ritual of The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was concerned with the ideal of “Rosicrucian rebirth, the regeneration of the old, corrupt world, and dawning of a new spirituality enlightened age.”<sup>21</sup> Its initiation rituals aimed directly at the regeneration of the individual and humanity.<sup>22</sup> As his above reading of the Festival of the Equinox makes clear Crowley the occultist was quick to realise the macrocosmic implications of these initiatic formulae. He held that in a direct way humanity would go through a process of initiation and ordeal as it entered the new era proclaimed in *Liber Al vel Legis*. For Crowley (writing in 1911) the magical ceremony initiating the New Aeon would be that of the ‘Bloody Sacrifice;’

There is a Magical operation of maximum importance: the Initiation of a New Aeon. When it becomes necessary to utter a Word, the whole Planet must be bathed in blood. Before man is ready to accept the Law of Thelema, the Great War must be fought. This Bloody Sacrifice is the critical point of the World-

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<sup>18</sup> *Liber Al vel Legis* – The Book of the Law I: 49 in *Ibid*.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Festival of the Equinox’ in Crowley (1997) op. cit. p.678

<sup>20</sup> See [<http://www.hermeticgoldendawn.org/gd-glossary.html>] (last accessed 26 June, 2003).

<sup>21</sup> Owen (1997) op. cit. p.102

<sup>22</sup> See van Egmond, D. (1998) ‘Western esoteric schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries’ in *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern times*. eds. Van den Broek and Hanegraaff, W. New York: SUNY, p.311-341. These rituals also contained formulae of practical magic. An instance is in the Neophyte initiation ritual in which the candidate is brought from darkness into light through a process of purification and consecration. The application of the Neophyte formula endows “a thing inert and impotent with balanced motion in a given direction” Crowley (1997) op. cit. p.166

Ceremony of the Proclamation of Horus, the Crowned and conquering Child,  
as Lord of the Aeon.<sup>23</sup>

Building on Frazer's notion of the 'Dying God' Crowley developed the idea of the 'Equinox of the Gods' to encompass three great stages in the evolution of humanity and religion. The great drama of the procession of the Aeons was prefigured in an "Egyptian theology" that "foresaw [the] progress of humanity and symbolised it in the triad of Isis, Osiris, Horus." Thus the three world ages; the Aeon of the Isis (Mother), the Aeon of Osiris (Father/ Dying God), and the Aeon of the Horus (Child). Crowley understood each age in terms of an evolutionary anthropology; the evolution of a new point of view. The Aeon of Isis, Bachofen's matriarchal age, was one of "gracious primitive paganism, " wherein "men did not know that the intervention of the male was necessary for human reproduction." The 'Mystery of sex' was first safeguarded and then exploited by a priest-hood anxious for "wealth and power."<sup>24</sup> The "worship of the Mother, continually breeding by her own virtue" gave way to the Aeon of Osiris, the patriarchal age dominated by the cult of the 'Dying God,' whose mysteries were predicated on the apparent daily death and resurrection of the sun. In the current Aeon it is understood that "light is everywhere." The New Aeon has as its Godhead neither the Mother nor the Father. Echoing Nietzsche<sup>25</sup> the Child is Godhead, standing as a symbolic "manifestation of continuous and inexhaustible" energy.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Crowley (1997) op. cit. p.208

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. p.702

<sup>25</sup> "The Child is innocence and forgetting, a new beginning, a game, a self-propelled wheel, a first movement, a sacred "Yes" cited in Perez, R. (1990) *On anarchy and schizoanalysis*. New York: Autonomedia. p.15

<sup>26</sup> Crowley (1997) op. cit. p.704

Following the First World War Crowley was able to understand how the drama of ‘Egyptian theology’ was playing out in world events;<sup>27</sup>

... War, revolution, and the collapse of the social and religious systems of civilisation ... proved plainly to him that whether he like it or no, Ra Hoor Khuit was indeed the Lord of the Aeon, the Crowned and Conquering Child whose innocence meant no more than inhuman cruelty and wantonly senseless destructiveness as he avenged Isis, our mother the Earth and the Heaven, for the murder and mutilation of Osiris, Man, her son.<sup>28</sup>

The Great Beast was to continue to read the ‘inhuman cruelty and wantonly senseless destructiveness’ of the early twentieth century in terms of the New Aeon. Yet “Strength will prepare the way for Justice”<sup>29</sup> and *Liber Al vel Legis* gives a clear formula for the role of the prophet and priest at the next Great Equinox;

But your holy place shall be untouched throughout the centuries: though with fire and sword it be burnt down & shattered, yet an invisible house there standeth, and shall stand until the fall of the Great Equinox; when Hrumachis shall arise and the double-wanded one assume my throne and place. Another prophet shall arise, and bring fresh fever from the skies; another woman shall awake the lust & worship of the Snake; another soul of God and beast shall mingle in the globed priest; another sacrifice shall stain the tomb; another king shall reign; and blessing no longer be poured To the Hawk-headed mystical Lord!

Though Crowley is hesitant to speculate about the coming Aeon<sup>30</sup> in an early commentary to the Book of the Law he understood the “doubled-wanded one” as representing a future Aeon of Justice. Thus, it is suggested that this ‘time of

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<sup>27</sup> As McCalla (1998) op. cit. explains the marriage of history and ‘illuminist’ themes in understanding cataclysmic historical events in terms of spiritual regeneration is far from unprecedented. Beyond Crowley’s ‘Egyptian theology’ Saint-Martin’s understanding of the French Revolution has curious parallels with Crowley’s view of the First World War. Both see in these historical events and their aftermath ‘images of the last judgment’ and inaugurations of a new era and humanity. The processes described by St-Martin and Crowley differ, but they do portray a similarity of approach.

<sup>28</sup> Crowley (1997) op. cit. p.422

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p.288

<sup>30</sup> Crowley notes in an early commentary “It may be a hundred or ten thousand years from now; for the computation of time is not here as there” in Crowley, A. (1991c) *The Law is for All*. ed. Regardie, I. rpt. Scottsdale, AZ: New Falcon, p. 288.

tribulation,' though it may last more than a thousand years, will establish the conditions for an as yet indistinct era of justice.

Just as Crowley's great narrative of the Aeons owes much to Frazer, so too do Crowley's conceptions of Magick, especially in relation to Frazer's view of a "lock-step progress for humanity from magic through religion to science."<sup>31</sup> While in the pattern of the three Aeons it would be tempting to stress a distant Joachite inheritance, the theory of the Aeons owes more to the anthropology of Frazer, and his three stages of 'lock-step progress.' Nevertheless it is significant that Crowley regarded himself as a reincarnation of French occultist Eliphas Levi. Indeed Crowley's own work can be seen as a 'prolongation'<sup>32</sup> of the work of French magician. Levi, who in a proto-typically 'occult' move, transformed the 'the Age of the Paraclete' and 'reign of the Light' to "the revelation of the true *science* of magic."<sup>33</sup>

The New Aeon announced "that Man is the Lord of His spirit"<sup>34</sup> and Crowley was keen to use the work of Frazer to establish this 'true science of magic.' Crowley shared with Frazer the view that "history was about the lessening of Man's reliance on the divine and the increasing recognition of his own power."<sup>35</sup> For Frazer the principles of magic "legitimately applied ... yield science," yet,

... illegitimately applied they yield magic, the bastard sister of science. It is therefore a truism, almost a tautology, to say that all magic is necessarily false

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<sup>31</sup> Ackerman, R. (1991) *The myth and ritual school: J.G. Frazer and the Cambridge Ritualists*. New York: Garland. P.66

<sup>32</sup> Faivre (1994) op. cit. p.88

<sup>33</sup> Trompf (1998) op. cit. p.279

<sup>34</sup> Crowley 'The Pentagram' in DuQuette, L.M. (1993) *The magick of Thelema: a handbook of the rituals of Aleister Crowley*. York Beach, ME: Weiser, p.5

<sup>35</sup> Trompf, G.W. (1990) *In search of origins*. New Delhi: Stirling.p.58

and barren; for were it ever to be become true and fruitful it would no longer be magic but science.<sup>36</sup>

Crowley saw that magic was not simply failed science but that “science was successful Magick.”<sup>37</sup> Therefore, Magick was the key to progress. With Frazer he shared the notion that having had recourse to religion humanity had abdicated its own power,<sup>38</sup> and Crowley gives the impression that it was in Aeon of the Dying God that religion took hold. Fulfilling the work of Levi, Crowley in his office of the Great Beast would promulgate a science of Magick that would restore full dignity to Frazerian Man crushed under the “weight of its fear of the unknown”<sup>39</sup> in impotent religion.

Frazer, the self-proclaimed “philosophic historian” and Crowley both accepted a ‘great man’ view of progress and a euhemeristic view of the gods.<sup>40</sup> As a ‘scientific illuminist’ Crowley saw progress driven by men of *illuminated* genius and that such illumination was replicable. In 1909 he concisely set forth this thesis in the following ‘theorems;’

- I. The world progresses by virtue of the appearance of Christs (geniuses).
- II. Christs (geniuses) are men with super-consciousness of the highest order.
- III. Super-consciousness of the highest order is obtainable by known methods.

Therefore, by employing the quintessence of known methods we cause the world to progress.<sup>41</sup>

How did Crowley reconcile the view that humanity progressed through the appearance of ‘Christs’ with the doctrine of the procession of the Aeons? How does

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<sup>36</sup> Frazer cited Ackerman, R. (1987) *J.G. Frazer: his life and work*. Cambridge: University Press, p. 158

<sup>37</sup> Crowley (1989) op. cit. p517

<sup>38</sup> Ackerman (1987) op. cit. p.158

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Frazer cited in Ackerman (1987) op. cit. p.239

the evolutionary progress of the Aeons coincide with the appearance of illuminated geniuses? Here we move to a parallel occult macrohistory asserting an evolutionary trajectory of a different type. This trajectory is concerned with both the Secret Chiefs and chains of *Prisca theologia* progressively revealing Truth, in a process recalling Albert Pike's Masonic macrohistory.<sup>42</sup> Here Crowley's work touches on 'positivist' history. In a short account of the life and work of her husband S.L. MacGregor Mathers (an early mentor of Crowley's), occultist Moina Mathers writes,

To write the consecutive history of an occult order is a difficult matter ... there being so much of an inner and secret nature necessarily involved in both; so much of the symbolical in the historical, so much of the latter in the symbology.<sup>43</sup>

Crowley made a short note to a passage describing his own visionary history of *Prisca theologia* "Scale of time – resolved images dilated presentation."<sup>44</sup>

It is unnecessary here to recount the history of the Hermetic Order of Golden Dawn except to say that as an occult order its authority rested on communication with 'Secret Chiefs.' As these claims became more tenuous the issue of direct contact with these guiding intelligences assumed vital importance for the Order's continuity. French argues that in response to a similar "existential crisis" emerging in the Theosophical Society, it is logical that, if the Masters do not 'descend' "then chelas will 'ascend' for the purposes of Mastership."<sup>45</sup> Through virtue of direct communication with the Secret Chiefs (the descent of the Masters) Crowley felt

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<sup>41</sup> 'Postcards to probationers' in Equinox I(2) at [<http://www.the-equinox.org/vol1/no2/eqi02016.html>] (last accessed 27/06/03)

<sup>42</sup> Trompf, G.W. (2003) 'Macrohistory.' unpublished draft article. It should be noted though that this word, as explained further in this paper, is no longer singular, "transmitting the exact knowledge of the Initiate," but reveals a doctrine progressively, in a reflection of Crowley's overall evolutionary scheme.

<sup>43</sup> Cited in Van Egmond, (1998) op. cit. p.328

<sup>44</sup> Crowley, A., et. al. (1996) *Commentaries on the Holy Books and other papers: being the Equinox, volume four, number one*. York Beach, ME: Weiser p.143

legitimised not to reconstitute the Golden Dawn, but also to later “ascend’ for the purposes of Mastership.”

Following his communication from the praeterhuman intelligence Aiwass, Crowley was conscious that the Secret Chiefs had appointed him visible head of the Order of the Golden Dawn. Following a short hiatus Crowley began to reformulate the Order he now knew as the Great White Brotherhood A.:A.:. Hymenaeus Beta notes that while this reformulation of the Order of the Golden Dawn included a number of important practical innovations<sup>46</sup> it was Crowley’s opening of the higher grades to human attainment that had deeper significance.<sup>47</sup> Crowley was developing a system of ‘known methods’ whereby students, following in his own wake, could, through natural ability and sheer dint of aspiration, discipline and spiritual courage, attain to the summits of the Great White Brotherhood. Through elucidating the Third Order grades of the A.:A. .:, Crowley was able to combine his own views of progress through illumination with his own role as prophet of the New Aeon. He was now the Magus uttering the “Creative Magical Word, which transforms the planet on which he lives.”<sup>48</sup>

In 1909 through techniques of “scrying in the spirit vision” Crowley undertook a series of visionary explorations of Elizabethan John Dee’s ‘Aethyrs.’<sup>49</sup> These visions formed the basis of the “doctrine of the function of the Great White Brotherhood

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<sup>45</sup> French, B.J (2001) ‘The theosophical masters: an investigation into the conceptual domains of H.P. Blavatsky and C.W. Leadbeater’. Ph.D thesis, University of Sydney.p.734

<sup>46</sup> For example the focus on individual over group work and the inclusion of yoga and meditation in its curriculum.

<sup>47</sup> Crowley (1997) op. cit.p. xlv.

<sup>48</sup> ‘One Star in Sight: a glimpse of the structure and system of the Great White Brotherhood A.A.’ in Crowley, A. et al. (1996) p.5

<sup>49</sup> Owen, A. (1997) op. cit. p.106

understood as the foundation of the Aspiration of the Adept.”<sup>50</sup> Personally for Crowley these visions formed a series of purifications and subsequent initiations ‘beyond the Abyss’ into the grade of Magister Templi. In the sixth Aethyr Crowley came to know a series of prophets as ‘the makers of Illusions’ (“for speech is two-fold, and truth is one”),<sup>51</sup>

None shall pass me except he slay me, and this is his curse, that, having slain me, he must take my office and become the maker of Illusions, the great deceiver, the setter of snares....

And this is the horror that was shown by the lake that was nigh unto the City of the Seven Hills, and this is the Mystery of the great prophets that have come unto mankind, Moses, and Buddha, and Lao Tan, and Krishna, and Jesus, and Osiris, and Mohammed; for all these attained the Grade of Magus, and therefore were they bound by the curse of Thoth.<sup>52</sup>

Here at the very visionary root of Crowley’s macrohistorical prophetology, highlighting his own debt to Frazer’s work, is invoked Frazer’s literary account of the “rule of the sanctuary” of the sacrificial priesthood of Nemi;

A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he retained office till he himself was slain by a stronger or a craftier.<sup>53</sup>

The ‘Mystery of the great prophets’ is one to which Crowley would return throughout his career, though the seven prophets mentioned in the sixth Aethyr went through some later revision. The figure of Jesus in this vision was regarded as a name “cunningly slipped by the Art of the God.”<sup>54</sup> Drawing on Frazer he later sought to include a number of possible alternatives to any suggestion of an historical Jesus that

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<sup>50</sup> Crowley, A., Neuburg, V. and Desti, M. (1998) *The Vision and the Voice with commentary and other papers*. York Beach, ME: Weiser. p.3

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. p.193

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, p 194

<sup>53</sup> Frazer, A. (1995) *The Golden Bough: a study in magic and religion*. London: Macmillan p.1

<sup>54</sup> Crowley, Neuburg and Desti (1998) op. cit.p.194. n.7

his own doctrine would have demanded. A work of 1913, *The Book of Lies*,<sup>55</sup> gave a cryptic summation of Crowley's doctrine. Here a systematised series is given (Lao-Tzu, Siddartha, Krishna, Tahuti, Mosheh, Dionysus and Mahmud) with Crowley himself (under his pseudonym Perdurabo) as the seventh prophet (Lao Tzu "counts as nought, owing to the nature of his doctrine").

In 1918, writing in *The Book of Wisdom or Folly*,<sup>56</sup> he developed the doctrine further, identifying each prophet not only with the grade of Magister Templi as he had done in the earlier work, but as Magi, each with their Creative Word. Re-imagining the New Testament Crowley identifies each member of the grade of Magus as the Logos of an Aeon, a Word become flesh;

And that these may be said it is necessary that One take human Flesh, and become a Magus in Our Holy Order.<sup>57</sup>

The chain of Magi runs Lao-Tze, Gautama, Krishna, Dionysus, Tahuti, Mosheh and Mohammed, ending finally with the Great Beast. In successive chapters Crowley outlines the nature of each Magus and their Word, "the secret History of those who have gone before me ... so far as Their Memory hath remained among Mankind."<sup>58</sup> Each figure is interpreted as elucidating and in a sense incarnating a particular Truth in a progressive revelation of magical doctrine. Both Lao-Tze and Gautama taught philosophies of movement and change in their respective Words 'TAO' and 'ANATTA.' Krishna offered a formula of Nature in 'AUM', and Dionysus "laid the Foundations of all Science," ie. the manipulation of that Nature, through the magical

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<sup>55</sup> Crowley, A. (1993a) *The Book of Lies which is also falsely called Breaks ... with an additional commentary*. rpt. York Beach, ME: Weiser

<sup>56</sup> Crowley, A. (1991a) *Liber Aleph vel CXI. The Book of Wisdom or Folly*, rev. 2nd edition, ed. Hymenaeus Beta, York Beach, ME: Weiser

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* p.68

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* p.69

formula of 'INRI' in which the Word 'IAO' is concealed. This formula is then expanded and explained by Tahuti in the Word 'AMOUN' and by Mosheh in the Word 'IHVH.' The figure of Mohammed (whose true word Crowley ventures was 'LA ALLH,' (there is) No God) is "darkened and confused by His nearness to our own Time," yet he is described arising,

... In the Time of the greatest possible Corruption and Darkness, when every Civilisation and every Religion had fallen into Ruin, by the Malice of the Great Sorcerer of Nazareth...<sup>59</sup>

The Word of the Aeon, as revealed to Crowley in *Liber Al vel Legis* is 'ABRAHADABRA', itself a word expressing a technique and doctrine of practical magic.

Crowley continued to develop his *Prisca theologia* and further connected them with the hidden hand of the Great White Brotherhood. In a move toward a fuller view of history leading to his own dispensation, in 1923 he wrote of "currents and sub-currents set in motion by the A.:A.:. every 600 years approximately, that is, twice in the course of every Aeon."<sup>60</sup>

In 1925 Crowley used his original vision of the Aethyr as a narrative device to present another account of his 'Mystery of the great prophets.' It offers his most developed view of the role of the prophets and emissaries of the Great White Brotherhood as they act in history and explicitly brings this history into his macrohistorical scheme of the Aeons;

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p.74

<sup>60</sup> Crowley, A. et al. (1996) p.143 The order runs Gautama Buddha in 300 BCE, followed 300 years later by Apollonius of Tyana, then Mohammed, Templar martyr Jacobus Burgundus Molensis in 1300 CE, and then from 15-1600, Dee and Kelly, Christian Rosenkreutz, Luther, Paracelsus.

Then my instructor showed me that the Brotherhood send forth one of Their fellows every two thousand years, bringing one Word to serve mankind as a new formula of Magick, that it may take one further step on the road that leadeth to Perfection.

Also, twice in that period, that is, at intervals of a little more than three, and a little less than seven, centuries, They send a lesser prophet to prepare the Way of the next Word, and to maintain or restore the virtue of the Word then current.<sup>61</sup>

Having set his schema of two thousand-year Aeons punctuated by two lesser prophets at three and seven hundred years intervals, Crowley offers a full history of the Great White Brotherhood. It begins with a series of prophets stretching beyond recorded history. Then dimly seen is Fu-Hsi followed by six prophets “sent to enlighten six great civilisations;”<sup>62</sup> Lao-Tzu, Gautama, Zarathustra, Pythagoras, Dionysus, Osiris. Then, following Apollon comes a period of degradation, the ‘Great Sorcery.’ The Brotherhood and their work of humanity’s perfection is “nigh utterly destroyed.”<sup>63</sup> There is “one glimmer” of light in Plotinus and in Jacobus Burgundus Molensis (“did not the Order of the Temple prepare the Renaissance by fusing the Mysteries of East and West?”<sup>64</sup>). Then comes Mohammed, who Crowley saw as his percussor, expunged the Great Sorcery, “by the sweep of steel.”<sup>65</sup> Next follow Edward Kelly and Christian Rosenkreutz, and finally Helena Blavatsky, preparing the world for the revelation of *Liber Al vel Legis*.

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<sup>61</sup> Crowley, A. (1992) *The Heart of the Master*. 3rd rev. edition, ed. Hymenaeus Beta, Scottsdale, AZ: New Falcon. p.102

<sup>62</sup> Crowley (1992) op. cit. p.102

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p.110

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. p.112

Having described Crowley's occult macrohistorical revelation in some detail we are now able to view some of its broad characteristics.<sup>66</sup> Crowley's occult history is an initiatic one, placing humanity in an "unfolding cosmic drama." The theory of the Aeons takes in vast cyclical astrological time, reflected in the ritual recurrence of the Equinox of the Gods. In Crowley's gradual 'ascension' to the previously extra-human grades of the Golden Dawn, the doctrine of the 'Secret Chiefs' was enlarged to include the idea of progress through 'Christs' of illuminated genius. Yet Crowley himself recognised of *Liber Al vel Legis* that "it presumes a conscious 'providential' direction in the course of Spiritual evolution."<sup>67</sup> This spiritual evolution was one in which humanity "comes to learn that unknown Crown."<sup>68</sup> This Crown for Crowley was the development of a true science of Magick based on the formula of the New Aeon. Humanity's self-sacrificing on the altars of religion in the Aeon of the Dying God would end with the establishment of the universal and scientific philosophy of *Liber Al vel Legis*.

Crowley's macrohistory of the Magi pertains to a different temporal order, and hints at a period of regress, the 'Great Sorcery.' The various emissaries of Great White Brotherhood have sought to combat this Sorcery. This conflict, with its premise (and promise) of occluded knowledge makes sense of the occult project. In a scheme of otherwise evolving knowledge it saves the tradition of 'primordial wisdom.'

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<sup>65</sup> Crowley (1992) op. cit. p.112

<sup>66</sup> A process that, in another mode, begs the following questions: Is Crowley's macrohistory simply a convenient (and obviously self-aggrandizing) explanation of the nature of his own claims as Prophet of the New Aeon (his chains of *prisca theologia*)? Is his development of theory of the Aeons a useful and construct to provide a convenient counterpoint (the Aeon of the Dying God) to his own philosophy of the Aeon of the Child?

<sup>67</sup> Crowley (1997) op. cit. p.702

<sup>68</sup> 'Liber LXI vel Causae' in Crowley, A. (1990) *Thelema: The holy books of Thelema*. York Beach, ME: Weiser. P. xxxvii.

It was a mark of the ‘occult’ moment as defined by Faivre and Deveney that it sought the reconciliation of ‘primordial wisdom’ with evolutionary progress. The difficulties of this process are inherent in Crowley’s attempt at a grand ‘occult’ narrative fusing these esoteric and evolutionist elements. Crowley was above all a magician and a ‘cunning man.’ While there is little doubt that he believed in the essential truths of his own macrohistorical vision, inasmuch as occult macrohistory is a dramatic game of ‘hide and seek,’ it is also “doctrine conveyed in the form of a parable.”<sup>69</sup> Therefore, whether true or false, it is of “a spiritual significance.”<sup>70</sup> Whatever the magical doctrine conveyed in Crowley’s macrohistory, that of most spiritual significance is surely summed up in the following words of the Magus of the Aeon, the Great Beast himself;

... the Magician cannot really perform any miracle unless that be already the Design of the Universe. So that he who sets out by saying, “I will impose my will on all things” ends “Thy will be done.”<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Crowley, A (1991b) op. cit. p.66

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Crowley, A. (1998) ‘The revival of Magick’ in *The revival of Magick and other essays..* eds. Hymenaeus Beta and Kaczynski, R. Tempe, AZ: New Falcon. p.15

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