

Martinism

The name "Martinism" refers to a constellation of different groups claiming the heritage of late eighteenth-century French esoteric masters Jacques Martinez de Pasqually (1727-1774), Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (1730-1824), and Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin (1743-1803). Martinez was primarily an occultist, while Saint-Martin was a Christian mystic, and Willermoz was mostly interested in esoteric Freemasonry. Strictly speaking, Saint-Martin did not establish any esoteric society, while Martinez's *Ordre des Élus Coëns*, to which both Saint-Martin and Willermoz belonged, disappeared in the first decades of the nineteenth century. Willermoz's masonic rituals still survive within certain branches of Freemasonry.

A "Martinist Order" (*Ordre Martiniste*) was founded in 1891 by the well-known French esoteric author, Papus (Gérard Encausse, 1865-1916), together with magnetist Henri Delaage (1825-1882) and esoteric librarian Augustin Chaboseau (1878-1946). Both Delaage and Chaboseau claimed to have received a succession from Saint-Martin, through an unbroken secret lineage of "Unknown Superiors" (*Supérieurs Inconnus*). Since no evidence confirming their claims ever surfaced, it is safer to conclude that there was no direct connection between the Martinist Order and either Saint-Martin and his occult mentor Martinez, or Willermoz.

The Martinist Order's main exponent was Papus. He taught a mixture of occult Freemasonry, Christian esotericism, and practical occultism. Later in life, Papus came under the influence of the Lyon healer, Nizier Anthelme Philippe, "Maître Philippe" (1849-1905), and incorporated the latter's brand of folk Christianity into the Martinist Order. By 1900, Papus' Martinist Order had been implanted in several European countries and in the United States, Argentina, and Brazil.

Papus died in 1916, and a large majority of Martinists recognized Charles Détré ("Téder," 1850-1918) as his successor. Téder, however, died in 1918, only two years after Papus. During his short tenure, he started a process re-orienting the order to a more decidedly occultist approach, inspired primarily by Martinez, and excluding from membership non-Freemasons and women. This process was continued by Jean Bricaud (1881-1934), Téder's successor, but also led to a complicate series of schisms.

Chaboseau, one of the surviving founding members of the *Ordre Martiniste*, established, together with Victor-Émile Michelet (1861-1938), a separate branch called Traditional Martinist Order. Victor Blanchard (1878-1953) founded in 1921 another splinter group, known as the Martinist and Synarchist Order. The situation was complicated by the ambitious attempt by Harvey Spencer Lewis (1883-1939), the founder of the Rosicrucian order AMORC, to federate all the main European and American occult societies into the FUDOSI, the Universal Federation Directing Initiatic Orders and Societies, that he established in 1934. The arch-rival of Lewis within the Rosicrucian world was Reuben Swinburne Clymer (1878-1966), who created in 1939 the rival FUDOFISI (Universal Federation of Initiatic Orders, Fraternities, and Societies). Occult orders had to take sides, and this division eventually had a deep impact on Martinism.

Blanchard's Martinist and Synarchist Order became a founding member of FUDOSI in 1934. Eventually, Blanchard resigned from his position as leader of the Order by appointing Lewis as his successor in 1937. In 1939, Lewis was also initiated in Chaboseau's Traditional Martinist Order, which in turn joined the FUDOSI. When World War II and the Nazi occupation of a large part of France made Martinist activities there impossible, Lewis claimed that the leadership of the Traditional Martinist Order had also been transmitted to him. He merged Blanchard's and Chaboseau's orders into one, and the Traditional Martinist Order continued to co-operate with AMORC, eventually deciding that only members of AMORC could be initiated into the Order. There are no official statistics about membership, but there is little doubt that the Traditional Martinist Order (TMO) is the largest Martinist organization in the world today, as membership is routinely proposed to the circa 120,000

adherents of AMORC. Those who join regard the experience in the TMO as somewhat ancillary to their AMORC membership.

As a reaction to the presence of the rival orders in the FUDOSI, Bricaud's successor, Constant Chevillon (1880-1944), made the Ordre Martiniste a founding member of FUDOFSI. He also became FUDOFSI's first president, and changed the name of his order into "Ordre Martiniste Martineziste" to emphasize the connection with Martinez. A sizable number of French Martinists sided with Chevillon, regarding his order as the direct continuation of the one founded in 1891. Chevillon continued to control a number of lodges outside France, including in Italy, where his order initiated a leading esoteric author, Arturo Reghini (1878-1946), and even the Italian national poet, Gabriele D'Annunzio (1863-1938). In Italy, one of the leading countries for number of Martinists, separations were caused by the strict connection between the Martinist Order and the Gnostic Church, strongly advocated by Bricaud and Chevillon and by their Italian correspondent, Vincenzo Soro (1895-1949). Those who were opposed to this connection established a separate Supreme Council of the Martinist Order, which was also more interested in Saint-Martin's mysticism than in Martinez's occultism.

All non-AMORC Martinist orders suffered greatly in the years immediately before and during World War II, as Martinism was regarded by the Nazis in Germany and the Fascists in Italy as part of Freemasonry, which was forbidden. Chevillon himself was assassinated by French Nazi collaborators in 1944. In the meantime, in the middle of the war, Robert Ambelain (1907-1997), who would go on to become a popular esoteric author in the post-war years, founded in 1942 a "Martinist Order of the Élus Coëns," as a purely Martinezist organization. Ambelain also claimed a chain of succession originating from Papus.

The Martinist Order (or the Martinist Martinezist Order, as it had been renamed) originally ignored Ambelain and elected Henri-Charles Dupont (1877-1960) as successor of the martyred Chevillon. Both Ambelain's and Dupont's orders were increasingly focused on Martinez, to the detriment of Saint-Martin, and neither was particularly interested in Maître Philippe. The son of Papus, Philippe Encausse (1906-1984), a medical doctor and a

high degree Freemason, was born a few months after Maître Philippe died, but regarded himself as his posthumous disciple. He was in touch with both the TMO and the Martinist (Martinezist) Order, but was not fully persuaded that they were true to Papus' spirit. He was initiated by Ambelain in his order, but in 1952 decided to revive both the Martinist Order and its old journal, *L'Initiation*, based on the teachings of both Saint-Martin and Maître Philippe, in addition to Martinez. He also opened the lodges to non-Freemasons and to women.

In 1958, a meeting was held to unify the three main non-AMORC Martinist orders, led respectively by Encausse, Ambelain, and Dupont. Dupont also appointed Encausse as his successor, with the result that after Dupont's death in 1960 the Martinist Martinezist Order merged into Encausse's Martinist Order. In 1962, Ambelain also merged his own order into Encausse's. This unified order did not control the whole of non-AMORC Martinism, however, as lodges had been founded in Canada, Mexico, South America, the Caribbean (particularly Barbados), Australia, and Eastern Europe, and most of them went their separate way. In Russia, despite legends about a local Martinism dating back to the eighteenth century, the first initiations were conferred by Papus in 1900 during a visit to Saint Petersburg. He had already initiated Russian expatriates in Paris between 1897 and 1899. In turn, Russian émigrés claiming a succession from Papus initiated Westerners who founded independent branches, including Armand Toussaint (1895-1994), whose Belgian-based *Ordre Martiniste des Chevaliers du Christ* (OMCC) expanded to several countries and maintains today some 350 members internationally. There are also some non-AMORC independent lodges in the United States, where, however, the large majority of Martinists belong to AMORC's TMO.

Italy remained the country with the largest number of non-AMORC Martinists (around one thousand), but the Italian lodges proved impervious to reunification. Saint-Martinist lodges under Ottavio Ulderico Zasio (1904-1966) and Gastone Ventura (1906-1981), strongly resisted the Martinezist orientation of the lodges connected with the French orders of Ambelain and Encausse, whose main leader was Francesco Brunelli ("Nebo", 1927-1982). Ventura also maintained the position that Martinism and Gnostic Churches should be

separated, while Brunelli was the leader at the same time of a Martinist Order and of the main Italian Gnostic Church.

Inspired by the French unification, the Ventura and Brunelli factions met in 1962 and created a unified Martinist Order in Italy, recognized by its French counterpart. Neither in Italy nor in France, however, the unification lasted for long. The ideological contrast between those mainly interested in Martinez's occultism and those who had joined Martinism mostly to cultivate the Christian mysticism of Saint-Martin and Maître Philippe led to further separations. In France, Ambelain and Encausse parted company in 1967. Encausse's *Ordre Martiniste* was led, after the death of Papus's son in 1984, first by Irénée Seguret (1903-1992) and then by Emilio Lorenzo. Its global membership is estimated between 300 and 600, and it has expanded to new countries, including Turkey, Ukraine (where a branch had already been established by Papus), and Japan. Ambelain's order fragmented into a number of small independent branches.

In Italy, Ventura and Brunelli separated again in 1971. Brunelli founded an *Ordine Martinista Antico e Tradizionale* (Ancient and Traditional Martinist Order, OMAT), whose first Grand Master was not Brunelli himself but Luigi Furlotti (1909-1972). At Furlotti's death, Brunelli became Grand Master and remained in this position until his death in 1982. After Brunelli, the OMAT went through various schisms, with the followers of Fabrizio Mariani (1938-2002), who had been OMAT's Grand Master between 1984 and 2002, separating and establishing a new Universal Martinist Order in 2002. OMAT, however, survived the schisms and, in addition to the Italian activities, in 2007 established the first functioning Martinist lodges in Romania.

Ventura continued with the name "*Ordine Martinista*" and at his death in 1981 was succeeded by Sebastiano Caracciolo (1921-2013). Those not accepting the leadership of Caracciolo founded a separate order, led by Gaspare Cannizzo (1938-2006), known simply as "*Ordine Martinista (Cannizzo)*" and reduced to a tiny remnant after the latter's death. Cannizzo's order was once significant in Sicily. However, in 1993 some leading members in Palermo joined Brunelli's OMAT and then, having left OMAT as well, founded an

independent Hermetic Martinist Order. Further controversies about the initiation of women led to the separation from Cannizzo's order, in 2003, of the Esoteric Martinist Order, under the leadership of Carmelo Cipolla and Antonio Urzì Brancati. The latter, a lawyer from Messina, Sicily, remains to this date the leader of the order, which, unlike Cannizzo's parent organization, is still quite active.

As for Ventura's Ordine Martinista, at the death of Caracciolo, competing claims to leadership by Renato Salvadeo and Roberto Randellini led to a separation not resolved to this date within an order that, with its some 300 members, is one of the largest in the international scene of non-AMORC Martinism.

It is impossible to resume the almost infinite fragmentation of Italian Martinism, as new orders are established every year, and its connections and alliances with Martinist orders in other countries, which appear in turn increasingly fragmented, particularly in the Caribbean, in Canada, and most recently in Russia. In other countries, including Sweden and Spain, groups originally connected with the French organizations became independent. In 2014, a number of Italian Martinist orders, with the notable absence of AMORC's TMA and of Brunelli's OMAT, met in Padua on September 27. They realized that unification was impossible, and created instead a Fratellanza Martinista Italiana (Italian Martinist Brotherhood), a service organization whose aim is to promote cooperative relations between the Martinist bodies, which remain separate and independent.

A similar attempt had been previously made in Evansville, Indiana, on April 8-9, 2000, to federate the non-AMORC Martinist orders of Canada, the Caribbean, and the United States, resulting in the foundation of the Ancient Martinist Order, although not all lodges in the American continents independent from AMORC belong to this group.

Martinism is a textbook example of how esoteric organizations are prone to separation and schism. Yet, although hopelessly divided in dozens of independent branches, Martinism remains well present in the esoteric milieu of the twenty-first century, and shows how

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relevant for the history of Western esotericism were the ideas of a small group of mystics who met in Lyon in the decades around the French Revolution.

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