



The Order of the Solar Temple

The Temple of Death

Edited by
James R. Lewis

ASHGATE e-BOOK

THE ORDER OF THE SOLAR TEMPLE

In October 1994, fifty-three members of the Order of the Solar Temple in Switzerland and Québec were murdered or committed suicide. This incident and two later group suicides in subsequent years played a pivotal role in inflaming the cult controversy in Europe, influencing the public to support harsher actions against non-traditional religions.

Despite the importance of the Order of the Solar Temple, there are relatively few studies published in English. This book brings together the best scholarship on the Solar Temple including newly commissioned pieces from leading scholars, a selection of Solar Temple documents, and important previously published articles newly edited for inclusion within this book. This is the first book-length study of the Order of the Solar Temple to be published in English.

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JAMES R. LEWIS
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List of Abbreviations

ADFI	L'Association pour la Defense des Familles et de l'Individu
AEIMR	L'Association d'Etude et d'Information sur les Mouvements Religieux
AMORC	Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis
ARC	Alliance Rose Croix/Association for Cultural Research
ARCHS	L'Académie de Recherche et Connaissance des Hautes Sciences
CAN	Cult Awareness Network
CESNUR	Centro Studi Sulle Nuove Religioni (Turin)
CINR	Centre d'Information sur les Nouvelles Religions (Montreal)
ETEC	Etudes Techniques et Commerciales
KVMRIS	Ordre Kabbalistic du Rose-Croix
NMM	new magical movement
NRM	new religious movement
OICST	International Order of Chivalry Solar Tradition
ONT	Ordo Novi Templi (Order of the New Templars)
ORT	Renewed Order of the Temple
OSMTJ	Sovereign and Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem
OSTS	Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple
OTO	Ordo Templi Orientis
OTS	Ordre du Temple Solaire
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
SAC	Service d'Action Civique
SQ	Sûreté du Québec

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Introduction

James R. Lewis

In October 1994, 53 members of the Order of the Solar Temple (l'Ordre du Temple Solaire, or OTS) in Switzerland and Quebec, Canada, were murdered or committed suicide. On 4 October, a fire destroyed a villa in Morin Heights, Canada, belonging to Joseph Di Mambro, the group's leader. Police found five charred bodies in the ruins. Three had been stabbed to death before the fire. At 1:00 a.m. on 5 October, a fire started in Ferme des Rochettes, near Cheiry, in the canton of Fribourg, one of the centers of the Solar Temple in Switzerland. Police found 23 bodies in a room that had been converted into a temple. Some had been shot; many others were found with their heads inside plastic bags. At 3:00 a.m. on the same day, three chalets inhabited by members of the Solar Temple caught fire almost simultaneously at Les Granges-sur-Salvan, in the Swiss Valais canton. Here police found 25 bodies, along with the remains of the devices that had initiated the fires as well as the pistol used in the Ferme des Rochettes shootings.

For many months prior to this initial spate of murder-suicides, rumors of financial mismanagement had been circulating among Solar Temple members. On 30 September, shortly before the group's dramatic final "transit," a three-month-old infant was killed at their Canadian site by a wooden stake driven through its heart. The parents, who were ex-members of the Temple, were also brutally murdered. Surviving members explained that Joseph Di Mambro had ordered the killing because the baby was the Antichrist. Several days later, Di Mambro and 12 followers convened a ritual Last Supper together. The murder-suicides took place not long after this meeting. Fifteen members of the inner circle—referred to as the "awakened"—took poison; 30 others—the "immortals"—were shot or smothered to death; while another eight, termed "traitors," were also murdered.

The plan seems to have been for the fire to more or less completely destroy everything in the Swiss centers. This would have compelled investigators to focus on the group's self-interpretation of their actions—a self-interpretation embodied in four letters, or "Testaments," that were sent to 60 journalists, scholars, and government officials. However, because the incendiary devices at the main center in the Cheiry farmhouse failed to ignite, many documents and other artifacts remained intact. One of the Testaments, addressed "To All Those Who Can Still Understand the Voice of Wisdom," issued a call for other Solar Temple sympathizers to follow their example:

[F]rom the Planes where we will work from now on and by a just law of magnetism, we will be in the position of calling back the last Servants capable of hearing this last message ... may our Love and our Peace accompany you during the terrible tests of the Apocalypse that await you. Know that from where we will be, we will always hold our arms open to

receive those who are worthy of joining us. [See Appendix 1 for the complete text of the Testaments.]

This invitation from the Temple members to join them in the beyond found a receptive audience. On 16 December 1995, 16 of the remaining European members disappeared from their homes in France and Switzerland. Four left notes hinting at a second mass suicide. Thirteen adults and three children were later found dead in a remote forest in southeast France. Investigators concluded that at least four of them did not die willingly. Most had been drugged. Two of the 16 had shot the others, poured gasoline over their bodies, set them on fire, and then shot themselves so that they would fall into the flames. Finally, five additional adult members and three teenage children apparently tried to commit suicide on the spring equinox of 20 March 1997, in Quebec. The attempt failed due to faulty equipment. The teenage sons and daughter of one of the couples convinced their parents that they wanted to live. They were then allowed to leave, and the adults subsequently succeeded in burning down the house with themselves in it. Four of the bodies were arranged to form a cross. The teens were found drugged and disoriented, but otherwise safe, in a nearby building. A note was found describing the group's belief that death on earth leads to a transit to a new planet where their lives would continue.

The Solar Temple tragedies played a pivotal role in inflaming the cult controversy in Europe. Although European anticultists had been active for decades, the spectacle of the murder-suicides influenced public opinion to support harsher actions against new religious movements (NRMs). Interestingly, this came at around the same time that the North American anticult movement suffered a severe setback as a consequence of the bankruptcy of the Cult Awareness Network (Melton 1999: 229). The Solar Temple incidents were directly responsible for prompting European governments to begin issuing official reports on the dangers posed by nontraditional religions (Introvigne 2004: 207) and, particularly in France and Belgium, a growing campaign emerged to "combat" alternative religions (Hervieu-Léger 2004: 49; Palmer 2004: 65; Lucas 2004: 346). The incidents also helped bolster the North American anticult movement, which supplied consultants for European governments, as well as the mind control ideology that became a central element of European reports and subsequent legislation (Shupe et al. 2004: 198).

Neo-Templarism

The Solar Temple's founder, Joseph Di Mambro, had sampled a variety of esoteric groups, including the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC). In the 1960s, he came into contact with several persons who would later play a role in Solar Temple history, including Jacques Breyer, who had initiated a "Templar resurgence" in France in 1952. Several groups, including the Order of the Solar Temple, have their roots in Breyer's work.

"Templar" in this context refers to the Knights Templar, the medieval order to which groups in the neo-Templar tradition ultimately trace their lineage. (This

claimed lineage is spurious; instead, neo-Templar groups are esoteric organizations in the theosophical tradition.) A wealthy, powerful order, the Knights Templar had inspired envy among European rulers. As a consequence, in 1307 the Templars were accused (probably falsely) of heresy and arrested en masse. In 1310, 54 knights who had recanted earlier confessions were burned alive at the stake. And four years later, the Grand Master of the order and a provincial leader were similarly burned alive. The fires set or attempted by Solar Temple members during all the murder-suicide incidents recounted above seem to have been inspired by the fiery deaths of the original Templars. Some observers (for example Introvigne, in this volume) have noted that the 53 OTS deaths in October 1994 almost certainly represented an attempt to mimic the 54 original Templar deaths. However, this attempt was frustrated by the last-minute escape of Thierry Huguenin, a Swiss dentist and ex-member who had “sensed trouble at Granges-sur-Salvan and fled” before he could be murdered (Harriss 1997).

Though a secretive organization, the original Knights Templar were almost certainly Orthodox Christians. However, their secrecy—in combination with the charges of heresy leveled against them in the fourteenth century—provided fertile grounds for speculation, allowing later esotericists to hypothesize that the order was secretly an esoteric-magical group. This line of speculation—bolstered by the unlikely claim that the order secretly survived into modern times—underlies contemporary neo-Templarism.

Massimo Introvigne, a scholar of the western magical milieu (Introvigne 1990), observes that most modern neo-Templar groups trace their origin to the Order of the Temple founded in 1805 by Bernard-Raymond Fabré-Palaprat. “This French physician and Freemason claimed to represent an uninterrupted succession of Templar ‘Grand Masters’ operating secretly since the suppression of the medieval Order in the fourteenth century” (Introvigne 2000: 140). It was this tradition that Breyer revived in the mid-twentieth century. It is interesting to note that the same neo-Templar tradition that attracted the founders of the Solar Temple informs the fictional Templarism found in Dan Brown’s bestselling novel *The Da Vinci Code* (2003).

Overview

Despite the obvious importance of the Solar Temple, there have been relatively few scholarly studies of this group. The present collection brings together some of the best research on the Solar Temple—a selection of articles previously published in English, translations of French articles, a set of original papers, and a selection of Solar Temple documents—to produce the first book-length study of the group in English.

The first five reprinted articles appear in the order in which they were originally published. Jean-François Mayer’s “Templars for the Age of Aquarius: The Archedia Clubs (1984–1991) and the International Chivalric Order of the Solar Tradition,”

which appeared in French in 1993, was the only academic treatment of the Solar Temple before the first tragedy in 1994. It is translated here into English for the first time.

Massimo Introvigne's "Ordeal by Fire: The Tragedy of the Solar Temple" was one of the first scholarly articles to appear in the wake of the initial Solar Temple incident. In addition to providing an overview of the murder-suicides, Introvigne places the OTS in the context of contemporary occult-esoteric movements, particularly the neo-Templar tradition.

In "Purity and Danger in the Solar Temple," Susan Palmer explores the Solar Temple within the framework of Mary Douglas's thinking about pollution fears and purity rituals. Palmer views this aspect of the OTS as an important factor in the murder-suicides, suggesting that "the magical aspect of the mass suicide expressed a concern for purity and for protecting the boundaries of their community."

John R. Hall's and Philip Schuyler's "The Mystical Apocalypse of the Solar Temple" is a reprint of the fifth chapter of Hall et al.'s *Apocalypse Observed*. To date, this overview is probably the most comprehensive account of the Order of the Solar Temple and the murder-suicides available in English. Readers with little or no background knowledge of the OTS might best be served if they begin with this chapter.

Jean-François Mayer's "The Dangers of Enlightenment: Apocalyptic Hopes and Anxieties in the Order of the Solar Temple"—originally presented at a conference in 1999—provides an overview of some of the apocalyptic beliefs of the Solar Temple. Mayer is also concerned to draw lessons from this case that might be applied to other, potentially violent apocalyptic groups.

In "Crises of Charismatic Authority and Millenarian Violence: The Case of the Order of the Solar Temple," John Walliss points out that, despite their vision of a planetary apocalypse, the Solar Temple's message was nevertheless optimistic. In the early days, OTS leaders not only believed they would survive, but also believed that they themselves would serve a role in the transition to the Aquarian Age. Walliss argues that this ideology of survival eventually gave way to one of death as a consequence of a series of crises in the group's charismatic authority.

In "Sources of Doctrine in the Solar Temple," George D. Chryssides discusses how the Solar Temple's worldview played a significant role in the events that led to the group's demise. He argues that there is a clearly identifiable worldview associated with the Order of the Solar Temple, and that the group's intellectual and spiritual pedigree can help to explain the notorious collective deaths of 1994, 1995, and 1997.

Henrik Bogdan's "Death as Initiation: Order of the Solar Temple and Rituals of Initiation" surveys Western esotericism and Masonic initiatory societies, focusing on the notion of death. Bogdan then examines the Solar Temple's initiatory system and analyzes a number of rituals. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the suicides in relation to Western esotericism and rituals of initiation, suggesting that these factors might provide us with a partial key for explaining the OTS murder-suicides.

In “The Ordre du Temple Solaire and the Quest for the Absolute Sun,” Marc Labelle begins by noting that many contemporary religious movements are preoccupied with the eschatological significance of the nuclear menace. He then discusses how the Solar Temple’s ideology was grounded in the desire to respond to—and, ultimately, escape from—nuclear and ecological disaster. This response was focused on a transformation of the human species. In his analysis, LaBelle draws on a variety of theorists, from Eliade to Freud.

Roland J. Campiche’s “Sects, Media and End of the World” is essentially a condensation of his 1995 book *Quand les sectes affolent: Ordre du Temple Solaire, medias et fin de millénaire*, which focuses on the representation of the OTS tragedy in the French-speaking media. Campiche is especially concerned with how the characteristic discourse of the modern mass media inevitably interprets religious organizations—especially groups like the Solar Temple—in non-religious terms.

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Chapter 1

Templars for the Age of Aquarius: The Archedia Clubs (1984–1991) and the International Chivalric Order of the Solar Tradition

Jean-François Mayer

Foreword (2005)

Before the 1994 “transit” of the Solar Temple made headlines across the world, few scholars were even aware of the existence of this small group. The following article was originally published in the January 1993 issue (no. 153) of the French newsletter *Mouvements Religieux*. Insofar as I know, it is the only research article ever published on the group before it became infamous. For this reason, it can be considered as historical material. Consequently, it has been translated into English for this volume without any changes, updates, or corrections. Of course, we know much more today about the group. Moreover, the article had not used all the information that I had already gathered at the time, and focused primarily on the person of Luc Jouret and his work as a representative case of the way the “cultic milieu” operated. The article was part of a wider research project on the history and sociology of alternative religions in Switzerland; the full results of that project were published in the form of a 400-page book, *Les Nouvelles Voies spirituelles. Enquête sur la religiosité parallèle en Suisse* (Lausanne, 1993).

Sometimes, the article was unknowingly premonitory—for instance when it claimed that the group would “draw researchers’ attention again one day,” although certainly not in the way the author had expected! The following article, published for the first time in English in this volume, provides an insight into the way the Solar Temple could be seen from outside before it became tragically famous.

As one will notice, the expression “Solar Temple” itself never appears. This reminds us that the group used several names (consecutively as well as simultaneously) over the years and launched several, partly overlapping structures, as can already be seen in several passages of this article. “Solar Temple”, however, became a convenient general label following the 1994 events. This paper covers what could have been described as the “exoteric” work of the organization in the late 1980s.

In contrast, most of the later articles on the Solar Temple have focused on its inner circle.

Original Foreword (1993)

As part of a large-scale study on new religious movements in Switzerland under the auspices of the Swiss National Foundation for Scientific Research (PNR 21), in 1987 we approached the Archedia Clubs active at the time in several cities of French-speaking Switzerland and France. In the fall of 1987, the “International Association of Sciences & Tradition Archedia Clubs” counted more than 350 members worldwide. The Archedia Clubs’ activities ceased during the summer of 1991. However, the movement embodied by the Archedia Clubs has not disappeared and could, in other forms, draw researchers’ attention again one day. The following case study is therefore intended as both a contribution to research on trends in contemporary alternative religiosity and an analysis of one stage in the history of a movement.

1. Observing and Participating in a Club

On 18 March 1987, homeopathic doctor Luc Jouret gave a lecture on the topic of “Love and Biology” in Lausanne (Switzerland) for “Archedia—Sciences and Tradition”. “In all existing forms, from the smallest to the largest, from the electron to the galaxy, we are witnessing a phenomenon of attraction,” read the flyer. “Can we speak ... of an awareness underlying all things that drives us to regain our original unity?” The hundreds of people from Lausanne and beyond pressing their way into the room were undoubtedly expecting answers to these questions.

A talented speaker, Luc Jouret knows how to captivate his audiences. He projects dynamism and youthfulness; he speaks in a friendly voice and does not use notes. The fact that he is a doctor also adds to his aura. However, his lecture soon strays from medicine and onto other topics. The main thread in his discussion is that humanity is on the cusp of the Age of Aquarius; religions will still exist in this new age, but will be “called to transform themselves in a unitary vision.” Luc Jouret discusses healthy eating (the majority of diseases are caused by not eating properly) as well as apocalyptic topics (forests are dying, volcanoes will erupt, and so on). He thus seems to possess both scientific knowledge and traditional wisdom.

At the conference exit, members of the Lausanne Archedia Club handed out flyers advertising an informational meeting about this group and its activities. I sent in my registration form and attended the 15 April information session in a rented room at a cultural center. The president of the local club began by explaining to the small audience that the Archedia approach was based on one fact: humanity was heading toward an impasse. Yet people can change the world only by changing themselves, and such was precisely the goal of the Archedia Clubs: “Everyone participates in the healing of the world at his or her own level.” He continued to explain that, as far as practical considerations were concerned, each club was managed by seven members

and concentrated on a particular theme—food was Lausanne’s. A plenary meeting was held once a month. Since Archedia International was in fact an international association, it supervised the local clubs and ensured that the Charter and club ethics were respected. Moreover, he said, a more interior and spiritual work existed; it was founded on the “Solar Tradition.” In addition to the “Exterior Relations Commissioner” (who was French), a Solar Tradition representative who had traveled from Geneva was also present at the meeting. During the question and answer session we learned that these spiritual teachings fall within a Templar tradition.

The Lausanne Club, founded three years earlier, counted 12 members at the time. The membership fees came to 142 Swiss francs per quarter, 105 of which went to Archedia International. The few newcomers present that evening were not asked to join the group immediately. Rather, the Archedia Clubs offered an “observer” membership as a first step; this permitted one to participate in activities without commitment (for three or six months, depending on the club) before making an informed decision. Of course, to respect certain thresholds in the progression, those with this temporary status were not allowed to participate in activities of the Solar Tradition branch (to which not all members of the clubs belonged, in any case). However, a three- to four-month preparatory course for entrance into the spiritual group was available.

This commitment-free trial period allowed contact to be maintained easily. On 6 May 1987, I was thus able to attend the monthly plenary meeting of the Lausanne Archedia Club. The meeting followed a precise order. In fact, that evening the club was inducting a new member. A vase containing a rose was placed on a table, and the new member read an “engagement of honor” aloud, promising to respect the ethics of the club and to work toward its growth.

There were about fifteen people present, including three “observer members.” The main topic of discussion was the first international convention of the Archedia Clubs, which had taken place in Tours in April. The results of Dr Jouret’s March conference in Lausanne were also discussed. Because of the large audience, they had tried to launch a variety of activities; but in light of the small number of “observer members” it seemed that the predictions had been too optimistic. We later learned that out of the 618 people present on 18 March, one member and five observer members joined two months later. The uncircumscribed nature of alternative religiosity makes it quite open to anything offered in the realm of the spiritual, but it does not lend itself to taking firm root: this was once again proven by the disproportionate number of enthusiastic audience members at Dr Jouret’s conference versus the number of those actually interested in joining the Archedia Clubs.

On 21 May 1987, another kind of event took place in Lausanne: an “inter-club” meeting for the clubs of the Lake Geneva region (French-speaking Switzerland and neighboring areas in France). Sixty to 70 people had traveled there to attend. The discussion focused mainly on exterior relations. Two main concerns were raised: communicating a *unified* image of the clubs and projecting an impression of *professionalism* to the outside world.

On 18 June 1987, the Lausanne Club organized a new information session. Of the 19 people present, nine were non-members. Several of the main topics of discussion from the 15 April session were picked up again, though in slightly different forms. At the 1 July 1987 club meeting, this information session was judged a success, even if it had resulted in only one observer member joining. However, it was noted in the minutes that, in order to meet the expectations of audience members, “it is necessary to further develop [the way we explain] the history of the club and what is really behind it.” The public is clearly interested in more than just the workshops on food—their curiosity is “above all piqued by the increasingly spiritual nature of Dr Jouret’s lectures,” as the president of the Lausanne Club explained at the 23 May “interclub” meeting.

On 27 June 1987, near Bonneville (the headquarters of one of the clubs), we attended the festival of St John along with the members of that region’s clubs. The event took place in a prairie, with a pole in the middle to mark the location of the bonfire—this spot had not been chosen at random, but according to cosmotellic considerations. We made our way to the large circle, following a path marked by stakes to which ribbons had been attached. We were told that we should move within the circle only in the clockwise direction. A lot of attention had been given to the details: the harmonious arrangement of the buffet tables for example, as well as the trays of aesthetically pleasing food (freshly picked organic vegetables).

There was a friendly and relaxed atmosphere among the eighty or so adult and several dozen children and adolescents who attended this event. When it came time for the ceremony, everyone formed a circle around the pole, the symbolic representation of the earth’s axis. The lighting of the fire followed a precise order: seven people each brought a bundle of a different type of wood and read a short text summarizing the essential symbolic aspects of their wood before placing it on the pyre. The wood was then simultaneously set on fire by the club presidents in attendance. Chanting and dancing around the fire followed. All of this, combined with the nighttime and the magic of the fire, contributed to a very warm and sociable feeling. A certain number of people remained there until dawn to watch the sunrise, according to the ancient custom.

After these two months of attending Archedia Club events, it was already possible to summarize a few observations:

- a) *Triple structure in the movement’s activities*: at the Archedian conference in Tours the need to pursue “Operation Pelican” was stressed. This involved setting up a (Solar Tradition) lodge for each club in the near future. The triple structure was observable in:
 1. *External activity*: conferences, intended for large audiences attracted by Luc Jouret, and generally organized by Amenta (the name Amenta Club had been used by the group which had assembled around Luc Jouret before the Archedia Clubs were founded in 1984.)

2. “*Internal-exoteric*” activity: the Archedia Clubs proper, that had come into being in Geneva in 1984. According to Archedia leaders,

A group of men with different backgrounds and complementary abilities, aware of the deterioration of the world and the disappearance of traditional values, decided to gather together sincere men and women who were sensitive to the same concerns. At first existing in the form of experimental groups (Sciences & Tradition), they very quickly organized themselves into Clubs and, powered by their success and the desire to pursue further research into spirituality, the Solar Tradition Branch was born.

3. “*Internal-esoteric*” activity: the International Chivalric Order of the Solar Tradition, which was also created in 1984.

- b) *Structure already in place for a movement of much larger dimensions*: the number of activities led by the handful of Lausanne members was striking. What is more, it all took place in a very structured context, each activity being recorded in minutes, reports, etc. The text of the “Universal Charter of the Sciences & Tradition Archedia Clubs,” the “International Constitution of the International Association of Sciences and Tradition Archedia Clubs” and the “Rules for Application” of the latter confirmed this first impression: there were precise and detailed rules, projects organized geographically by “sector,” “region” and “country”: from the start, the founders of the movement had thought big, intending to progressively develop it into a large-scale organization.
- c) *Emphasis on practical activities in the Archedia Clubs*: anyone expecting long spiritual meditation sessions would have been rather surprised by the Lausanne Club’s activities. Its members placed a lot of importance on nutrition and organized cooking classes, workshops, etc. Although the Club had given up the idea of opening a vegetarian restaurant (too much of a commitment compared with the number of people willing to help out), one member was managing a health-food store in the heights of Lausanne. It had been created as a cooperative with the very active support of club members. This “practical” side was an explicit goal of the movement: “We are original in that we spread a Science of Concrete Life in the form of an initiatory spiritual teaching which can be applied to the Clubs’ practical projects (health, nutrition, education, cultural performances, etc.)” In fact, many spiritual seekers belong to esoteric organizations and apply different techniques, but in the end, very few change “in their everyday lives, their state of awareness and at the level of their being.” They discover new “ideas,” but “all these aspects ... remain at the level of their ‘heads’—they neither enter their ‘hearts’ nor are ‘integrated’ in their lives” (Roche de Coppens 1986: 4).

- d) *Social side of club life*: the club members working together to open a health-food store provides a glimpse of a level of social interaction going beyond simply belonging to a cultural club. Each new member, in principle, had a sponsor; this further reinforced personal connections. One of the advantages of Archedia Club membership given at the 18 June informational meeting was the fact that a traveling member would no longer have to stay in hotels but could be accommodated by other members.

At the end of June I decided to reveal the reasons for my participation to the club leaders I had met. This approach was well received and gave me the opportunity for even greater access, including the chance for a long private interview with Dr Jouret in December 1987. Of course, my sources have not been limited to the information coming from the Archedia Clubs themselves. I met some (occasionally very critical) outsiders who had followed certain stages in the development of the movement or Dr Jouret's activities. I also met at least one former member. Nevertheless, it is difficult to reconstitute the early history of the Archedia Clubs. Much of the data is vague, even contradictory, from one informant to another, and I do not claim that the following information is complete: I will gratefully accept any corrections.

2. The Archedian World and its History

If my information is correct, the Archedian movement has its origins in both a series of Geneva-area spiritual groups and an attempt to recreate the Order of the Temple. In Saconnex d'Arve, in Geneva, there was a very attractive conference center called the Golden Way Foundation. When Luc Jouret arrived in Geneva in the early 1980s he was invited there to give several lectures for the Foundation (he had begun a career as a professional speaker in Belgium two years before). In 1983, Jouret spoke there for the Amenta Club (cf. *La Suisse* newspaper, 11 March 1983). Apparently, this club was international from the beginning, since that same year it also listed an address in Quebec, where Dr Jouret would also lecture. (During my field investigation in 1987, I several times heard mention of a farm established by the movement in Canada. Swiss members would occasionally travel there to work.) In 1984, there were Amenta Clubs in Brittany, Angers and elsewhere. The Archedia Clubs seem to have been created that same year, but it is clear that they grew from a foundation that was already well developed even before Dr Jouret came onto the scene.

The International Chivalric Order of the Solar Temple was also born in 1984. It was the fruit of the 1952 attempt to bring about the resurgence of the Order of the Temple in France; it began its present phase of activities at a meeting held in Switzerland on 21 March 1981 (cf. Delaforge 1987: 136–7). The date of 1952 is significant if one takes into account that the Archedia Clubs willingly circulated

writings and cassettes by Jacques Breyer, whose work was frequently alluded to. Jacques Breyer then lived in Arginy Castle (in Rhône) and belonged to the group at the origins of the foundation of the Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple (founded 12 June 1952), although he left it in 1964 (cf. Bayard 1989: 43). Undoubtedly this is where the 1952 Order of the Temple resurgence efforts (to which the International Chivalric Order of the Solar Temple alluded) had taken place—the “solar” reference confirms this impression. Breyer is the author of a rather difficult work; his main book, *Arcanes solaires; ou les secrets du Temple Solaire*,¹ was published in 1959 (cf. *Destin*, March 1960, p. 1665). We also find an echo of his work in the journal *La Voix Solaire*² (founded in 1961), which often featured Jacques Breyer’s articles, all written in his very particular and rather hermetic style.

The Renovated Order of the Temple—founded in 1968 with Julien Origas at its head—would follow in the tradition of the Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple and AMORC.³ (It is interesting to note that, according to Luc Jouret himself, several members of the Solar Tradition had come from AMORC.) Luc Jouret was said to have met Origas (who had also been to the Golden Way Foundation) for the first time in a restaurant in Geneva. Jouret briefly succeeded Origas as head of the Renovated Order of the Temple after the latter’s death, but the hostility of some members soon forced him to resign. As in any conflict of this kind, severe accusations were made on both sides. In 1983 Luc Jouret joined the Renovated Order of the Temple, which was dissolved in the autumn of 1984. Its members received the first four issues of *Excalibur*, a journal being put out by Amenta at the time (it stopped publication in the summer of 1987).

Clearly, the origins of the Archedian activities had a background that was much more complicated than Dr Jouret’s audiences could imagine. Especially striking is the interaction between the different groups. But it can be said that their core group, as it appeared in 1987, was composed mainly of:

- a) ex-members of the Renovated Order of the Temple;
- b) patients of Luc Jouret (from his homeopathic practice in Annemasse);
- c) people who had been to Luc Jouret’s lectures.

Because of the large role played by Luc Jouret, one must examine his approach and message, such as they could be observed in 1987. I will deliberately emphasize in the following section the “spiritual” aspects of his approach, without attempting to cover the entirety of his discourse.

1 *Solar Mysteries or the Secrets of the Solar Temple*. After 1995 new evidence surfaced. The author today is certainly less persuaded that secret services really had a significant role in the event. For the author’s (so far) final conclusions about what happened see Introvigne and Mayer 2002.

2 *The Solar Voice*.

3 The Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis.

3. Dr Luc Jouret's message

A Belgian citizen, Luc Jouret was born in Africa on 18 October 1947. He studied medicine at the Free University of Brussels, earning his doctorate in 1974. He then practiced general medicine for three years. After this, dissatisfied by traditional medicine, he began a “personal quest through all medical practices and made many trips all over the world,” synthesizing the practices into a medicine that “treats man in his totality.” One learned from Luc Jouret’s speeches that he lived in the Philippines from 1976 to 1977 and that he worked there with two or three well-known healers, acting “at the level of the energetic bodies of his patients.” In the second of a series of interviews broadcast in 1987 on Yvette Rielle’s program *L’Eternel Présent*⁴ (Radio Suisse Romande), Luc Jouret declared “for me, the Philippines was an environment to learn my profession,” and that it was an experience that led him to “return to the West to accept my evolution.” He said his travels were the chance for him “to integrate different human components.” But Luc Jouret’s experiences were not only medical in nature, he said: although his was a “non-religious education” and a “difficult youth”, he had had spiritual experiences at certain times:

There were some transcendent experiences in my life, some experiences that made me directly experience a superior aspect of man—to which I had previously been blind ... (*L’Eternel Présent*, 1987, 1st episode)

Dr Jouret acknowledges having been curious, having done multiple experiments, having gone to investigate many groups. He says, however, that he had not read much in the field of spiritualism. But, in his mind, the homeopathic approach necessarily had to lead to other dimensions, he explained during the private interview I conducted with him in December 1987. “Perhaps medicine needs to have a dimension that is—why not?—sacerdotal” (Conference of 5–6 October 1987 in Lausanne).

in all great civilizations we notice that doctors were always priests and vice-versa ... I am convinced...that a doctor who is not concerned with reintegrating himself into a dimension in which the spiritual is more important than the physical cannot understand his patient as such. And this is rather the tragedy of medicine today, not to denigrate its authentic value concerning what it has allowed as far as transformation of man, but it nevertheless still leads to a dead end ... because it refuses to integrate the spiritual man into the physical man, even though the spiritual has conditioned the physical (*L’Eternel Présent*, 4th episode)

The union of therapeutic and sacerdotal is key to understanding the philosophy that attracted Luc Jouret and several other doctors who ended up taking on the role of “spiritual guide” (even if they do not always define their work in these terms). The simple fact of being a doctor confers an aura of credibility. And, particularly if the doctor insists on a “holistic” approach or integrates spiritual considerations into his work, he can easily find himself slipping into a role similar to one that, in the

4 *The Eternal Present*, broadcast on Channel 2 of the Swiss National Radio.

past, a priest would have played for his congregation. This can happen even more easily when the doctor is already supposed to hold the answers to physical or even psychological problems: if he goes on to address other fundamental questions it is only a shifting or extension of his competence.

It is ... a common observation in the literature about social influence and decision-making that relatively high-status, especially when based on technical expertise, can easily be used to gain deference in areas beyond the scope of actual competence. (Ofshe 1986: 186)

In this particular case, the “sacerdotal” dimension that Luc Jouret insists upon perhaps manifests itself more concretely because, according to one participant, there are liturgical celebrations within the Templar branch, at least some of which include an “Essene rite.” On this subject, it is interesting to note that an “Essene rite” was already being practiced in the Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple (cf. Plume and Pasquini 1980: 338), the group that had resulted from the 1952 resurgence.

Although Dr Jouret claims to be “one of the representatives [of the Temple resurgence] in the secular world” (Geneva, 13 October 1987) and that he is guided by Templar superiors (interview of 15 December 1987), he does not present himself as an initiate, but as a person mandated to take care of work in a precise sector. However, at the seminars he hosts, Jouret clearly brings his audience to believe that they belong to a small chosen circle, and that they can understand the meaning of events and world changes: no one is here by chance; the people present have come because they are ready to understand certain things. I met people at seminars in Switzerland who had come from Belgium, Nice, and Brittany simply to hear Jouret speak for one or two evenings.

Like many others, the message propagated by Luc Jouret is intimately tied to the conviction that we are entering the Age of Aquarius: each astrological era is marked by a totally different rate of vibration; at the beginning of the Age of Aquarius we can no longer live with laws from two thousand years ago, a time when no scientific contributions had yet been made (Geneva, 5 October 1987). “If we do not consider tradition in light of scientific facts, it is useless; nothing can be learned from it. By the same token, if science does not incorporate tradition into its facts, it too is useless” (*L’Eternel Présent*, 3rd episode). We live in a period of fundamental transmutation: “We are in the reign of fire, everything is being burned” (Geneva, 13 October 1987). Gigantic upheaval is on the way, “we are making a leap into what I call macro evolution” (*L’Eternel Présent*, 3rd episode). Luc Jouret feels that humanity is currently in a very sad state; that it “has completely slipped” (*L’Eternel Présent*, 5th episode). Humanity’s brutishness is all the more tragic as it is occurring at the moment in evolution when new abilities can awaken, when man should transform himself and make a leap:

Our brains will undergo modifications, physical in the second phase, but certainly subtle and vibratory at first, which will cause man (the ones who are able) to react completely, and in a different way to events. (*L’Eternel Présent*, 2nd episode)

For, despite all humanity's deviations, "the worlds' energetic contingencies are such that there is hope that a group of men and women will rise up to live the experience" (*L'Eternel Présent*, 2nd episode). In two lectures (in October 1987) on the topic "Templar tradition and the modern world," Luc Jouret explained the nature and function of the Temple in a little more detail: it is the manifestation of a celestial archetype among men and will bring together men and women who are marked with the celestial seal and are willing to serve. Templars reappear during each phase of humanity's development. The Temple is at the origin of all the great currents of awareness—even religious movements and Masonry.

What then is the attitude toward religions? The tragedy of faith, Luc Jouret says, is that it isolates the Creator from His Creation, that it sees a God outside of us, even though according to mystic vision, "the Creator is fused with His Creation" (Lausanne, 5 October 1987). "... the essence of God is what makes things evolve ..." (*L'Eternel Présent*, 4th episode). Or, in other words: "My notion of God is that He is the essence of what makes all things happen" (Lausanne, 5 October 1987); "God cannot be defined in terms other than movement and evolution" (Lausanne, 6 October 1987).

Luc Jouret makes frequent reference to Christ, as he does to Christianity in general: he has given talks on the Apocalypse (Lausanne, October 1987) and "Parables throughout the Gospels" (Geneva, November 1991). But it is clear that Luc Jouret's interpretation is rather different from that of the Churches. Christ is presented as an initiate, as "a solar entity" (*L'Eternel Présent*, 5th episode). "All religions fall and have failed in their duty"; "the Vatican has certainly forgotten the primordial and basic teachings" (13–14 October 1987). Nevertheless, according to Dr Jouret, the Templar is fundamentally Christian. The Temple pursues seven core goals that we can attempt to summarize, according to Jouret, in the following ways:

- a) *Reestablish knowledge of authority and power* (power of the Spirit) in a period of dissolution;
- b) *Affirm the primacy of the spiritual over the temporal* (one must pass through exaggerated materialism to rediscover the value of the mind);
- c) *Make man aware of his dignity* (pull him out of his brutishness, laziness, unhealthy eating, consumer mentality);
- d) *Help humanity through its passage* by being aware that we will live through a dissolution on a collective scale;
- e) *Participate in the assumption of the Earth*: the Templar is aware that the Earth is his surrogate mother, and Templars have always been devoted to their earthly mothers, represented by the Virgin; the universal Virgin gave birth to the universe; one of the Temple's goals is to make the Earth sacred and preserve it.

- f) *Help unify the Churches* (and reunite the three great religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam);
- g) The key objective is the *return of Christ in solar glory*.

The essence of Luc Jouret's message can be characterized by the word "unity": awareness must be brought back to the original unity; a scattered awareness must be reassembled into a unitary awareness. The final phase of the cycle is the "reunification of awareness to Omega". We pass through the disparity of life only so we can merge ourselves again into primordial unity. This "unitary" perspective indeed corresponds to an aspiration that is quite widespread in the world of alternative religiosity.

Conclusion

The Archedia Clubs' activities ceased in the summer of 1991, and a certain number of high-ranking members seem to have distanced themselves from the movement during this period. But the Solar Tradition branch still exists, and Dr Luc Jouret, who recently published a book in Canada (Jouret 1992), is pursuing his career as an international speaker under the auspices of Atlanta. The movement has seen changes, reorganizations, and departures, but one must not lose sight of the permanence behind the changing labels, nor let oneself be misled by their variety.

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Chapter 2

Ordeal by Fire: The Tragedy of the Solar Temple¹

Massimo Introvigne

On 4 and 5 October 1994, fifty-three people were found dead in Switzerland and in Canada. Their bodies—some showing signs of violence suffered before the fires—were found in the incinerated centres of a neo-Templar movement called originally International Order of Chivalry Solar Tradition or, for short, Solar Tradition, and after 1990–91 Order of the Solar Temple. The movement is part of one of several currents which as a whole compose the universe of the contemporary occult-esoteric movements, the neo-Templar tradition. In this paper I propose to trace, first of all, the history of the neo-Templar tradition, then that of the Solar Temple, relating the essential information on the tragedy of October 1994, and finally suggesting some possible interpretations.² © 1995 Academic Press Limited.

I. The Neo-Templar Tradition

“Templar” Degrees within Freemasonry

The modern neo-Templar tradition is not a continuation of the Order of the Temple, a monastic-chivalric Catholic order founded in 1118–19 by Hugues de Payens (or Payns) and dissolved by Pope Clement V after the cruel persecution by Philip the Fair, King of France, in 1307. After its suppression, the order survived for a few decades outside of France, but by the beginning of the 15th century the Templars had totally vanished. The theory of a secret continuation of the order has been criticized

1 This paper was originally given in February 1995 as a report for associates and friends of the Centre for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR), Turin, Italy.

2 Sources I found very useful include a dossier of Canadian press articles on the Solar Temple preceding the events of October 1994, compiled by Montreal’s Centre d’Information sur les Nouvelles Religions, as well as CESNUR’s collection of associated US, Swiss, and Canadian articles. I mention here some of the most thorough ones concerning facts, but whose opinions are to be read cautiously: Michael Matza, “Mix of apocalypse and ego drove cultist”, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 October 1994; Alan Riding, “A Preacher with a Dark Side Led Cultists to Swiss Chalets”, *The New York Times*, 9 October 1994; see also Massimo Introvigne and J. Gordon Melton, “The Solar Temple. A preliminary report on the roots of a tragedy”, a paper presented at the annual conference of the Communal Studies Association in Oneida, New York, 6–9 October 1994; and Tom Post, Marcus Mabry, Theodore Stanger, Linda Kay, and Charles S. Lee, “Suicide cult”, *Newsweek*, 17 October 1994, pp. 10–15.

by academic scholars of medieval Templar history, such as Régine Pernoud, as “totally insane” and tied to “uniformly foolish” claims and legends.³

The idea that the Templars, though officially suppressed, secretly continued their activities until the 18th century, spread mostly among French and German Freemasons.⁴ When it was introduced from England to continental Europe, Freemasonry could in fact hardly present itself as merely the heir—no matter how much esoterically reinterpreted in its meaning—of the British trade guilds of masons (composed not only of architects, but also of simple bricklayers). Its origins were too humble to be acceptable to the European nobles Freemasonry hoped to attract. The legend was thus formulated of persecuted knights finding a “hiding place” in the English and Scottish guilds of masons, where they could continue their activities. Especially in Germany, these mysterious knights were quickly identified with the Templars. These are the origins of the Templar degrees of Freemasonry. They were created in continental Europe, but extended to the United Kingdom through the activities of Thomas Dunckerley (1724–95), who in 1791 founded the “Grand Conclave of Knights Templars” (later known as “Grand Priory of Knights Templars”) within English Freemasonry.⁵ “Templar” Masonic degrees are today found in both the Scottish and the York Rites, and originated from the present Encampments of Knights Templars, composed exclusively of Freemasons and widespread within Anglo-American Freemasonry.⁶

The presence of Templar degrees in the great majority of Masonic rites and obediences found today throughout the world must be correctly interpreted, and there could be two different levels of interpretation. At a first level, one could mention the idea of propagating a new organization such as Freemasonry through a captivating ritual, such as the one derived—with a lavish display of costumes and swords—from the chivalric world of medieval times. At a second level, dating from the 18th century, a tension was already developing within Freemasonry between a rationalistic “cool current” and a “warm current,” more interested in esotericism and the occult. Such tension not only divided each of the several obediences and lodges from the others, but also often existed within the same obediences where a lodge

3 Régine Pernoud, *Les Templiers* (Paris, 1988), p. 11. For more details, see Marco Tangheroni, “La leggenda templare massonica e la realtà storica”, in Introvigne (ed.), *Massoneria e Religioni* (Turin, 1994), pp. 63–78.

4 For a detailed account of the matter, see René Le Forestier, *La Franc-maçonnerie templière et occultiste aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles* (Paris, 1987), vol. 2.

5 See Frederick Smyth, *Brethren in Chivalry: A Celebration of Two Hundred Years of the Great Priory of the United Religious, Military and Masonic Orders of St. John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes and Malta of England and Wales and Provinces Overseas* (London, 1991). According to Smyth it is possible that “Templar” Masonry reached Ireland even before England, maybe as early as the 1760s (p. 19).

6 See Massimo Introvigne, “Che cos’è la massoneria: il problema delle origini e le origini del problema”, in Introvigne, *Massoneria e Religioni* (Turin, 1994), pp. 13–62.

could easily include both rationalists and occultists.⁷ The Templar legend appealed, for different reasons, to both “cool” and “warm” currents. The “warm current” presented medieval Templars as esoteric magicians, keepers of occult secrets (in the wake of what today’s historians regard as libelous allegations of witchcraft generated by the propaganda spread by Philip the Fair in his desire to destroy the Templar order for economic and political reasons). The “cool current,” considered the Templars to be not only victims of tragic historic circumstances, but rebels against the French monarchy and the Roman Church (“against the Throne and the Altar,” according to the terminology of that time), and therefore predecessors of the Enlightenment protest and, later on, of the French Revolution. This consideration is once again false, if we consider the Templars’ real history, but represents an integral part of the myth surrounding them in the 18th century.

The Origins of Independent Neo-Templarism

During the French Revolution—an especially complicated time in Masonic history—not everyone agreed with the assumption that the set of Templar degrees was only a part of the Masonic system, and that it was therefore to remain subordinated to Freemasonry as a whole and to its leadership (although today such an assumption is accepted in the majority of Masonic obediences and rites). The first disagreements originated in the Lodge of the Knights of the Cross in Paris. There it was argued that, if the Templar legend is true and the British guilds of Freemasons are “interesting” only because they have offered, since the fourteenth century, a hiding place to the heirs of the Templar Order, then the Templar Order precedes Freemasonry, and the Masonic organizations must be subordinated to the (neo-)Templar ones and not vice versa. This controversy began with a Masonic adventurer active at the time of the French Revolution, a Paris physician called Bernard-Raymond Fabr -Palaprat (1773–1838). In 1804 he declared to have discovered—together with his colleagues of the above-mentioned Masonic Lodge of the Knights of the Cross in Paris—some documents proving the existence of an uninterrupted succession of Templar “Grand Masters,” operating secretly from the suppression of the order in 1307 to 1792 (when the last “hidden” Grand Master, Duke Louis Hercule Timol on de Cross -Brissac, died in Versailles, massacred by the Jacobins). With the French Revolution and the fall of the French monarchy, the Templars were now able to come into the open. In 1805 Fabr -Palaprat reconstructed the Templar Order, and proclaimed himself Grand Master. The idea of an autonomous Templar Order (independent of Freemasonry, unlike the Templar degrees) was generally well accepted in the occult subculture, and caught the interest of Napoleon himself, who authorized a solemn ceremony in 1808.⁸

7 See Introvigne, *Il cappello del mago. I nuovi movimenti magici dallo spiritismo al satanismo* (Milan, 1990).

8 On Bernard-Raymond Fabr -Palaprat, his Order of the Temple and the Johannite Church, see *ibid.*, pp. 233–7; and—from a skeptical yet favourable viewpoint—the work of

In spite of Napoleon's interest, the Catholic Church remained obviously hostile to neo-Templarism. Fabr -Palaprat called the Roman Church "a fallen church" and founded in its place an "esoteric," so-called "Johannite" church, of which more later—due to his supposed prerogatives as Templar Grand Master—he consecrated as bishop the radical socialist and former Catholic priest Ferdinand-Fran ois Ch tel (1795–1857). From the 1830s onwards the neo-Templar movement intertwines therefore with the "independent churches," schismatic groups led by "bishops" claiming an irregular, but nevertheless "valid" consecration of more or less remote Catholic or Orthodox origins, due to the Catholic theory that the apostolic succession may validly continue also outside the Church of Rome as long as the consecrating bishop is a "real" (although schismatic or excommunicated) bishop and was in turn consecrated by a "valid" bishop. The intertwining still remains today, within certain limits, and often, wherever there is a neo-Templar order, we find an "independent church" under the same leadership (and vice versa). There is no evidence that Luc Jouret, the co-founder of the Solar Temple, was consecrated as a bishop, but he was ordained a priest in one of the French "independent churches" and in this capacity occasionally celebrated what he called an "Essene ritual," in fact a version of the Catholic Mass.

In any case, Bernard-Raymond Fabr -Palaprat gave birth to a neo-Templarism independent of Freemasonry, though largely composed of "knights" who were at the same time Freemasons. Today the Templar knights and degrees within Freemasonry are found mostly in Anglo-Saxon countries, while Fabr -Palaprat's autonomous neo-Templarism has remained largely confined to Latin countries.

The Neo-Templar Movement from 1838 to 1970

After Bernard-Raymond Fabr -Palaprat's death in 1838, the neo-Templars experienced their first schism, dividing promoters and opponents of the ties between the Templar Order and the Johannite Church of Ferdinand-Fran ois Ch tel. (The Johannite Church, the history of which is not part of this paper, continues to have heirs to this day, though not all of them are at the same time neo-Templars.) The two branches, led respectively by Count Jules de Moreton de Chabrillan and Admiral William Sydney Smith, reconciled in 1841 under the leadership of Jean-Marie Raoul. The Templar Order had, however, gone out of fashion and—in Masonic terminology— one of Raoul's successors, A.M. Vernois, put it "to sleep" in 1871. Later on, the "regency" of the order was given by some surviving members to the poet Jos phin P ladan (1858–1918), who, however, was mainly interested in another order he himself created, the Order of the Catholic Rose-Croix of the Temple and the Grail. Those were the years of the occult revival of the late 19th century. The Templar Order, with dozens of other groups, ended in the great melting pot of occult orders operated by the strange bedfellows Jos phin P ladan and Papus (*nom de*

the Gnostic Church's bishop, L once Fabr  Des Essarts, *Les Hi rophantes. Etudes sur les fondateurs de religions depuis la R volution jusqu'  nos jours* (Paris, 1905), pp. 124–53.

plume of the medical doctor Gérard Encausse, 1868–1916).⁹ During these years, a certain “Templar” terminology and symbology was fashionable in a long series of occult movements of different origins: to quote just some of the most relevant examples, the Ordo Templi Orientis (OTO), was founded by Austrian industrialist Carl Kellner (1850–1905) and made famous later by the British magician Aleister Crowley (1875–1947) in the world of ceremonial magic; and the Ordo Novi Templi (ONT) was created in 1907 by Jorg Länz von Liebenfels (1874–1954) within the German “Ariosophy,” a pan-German and racist version of Rosicrucian and theosophic themes, which later had a real, but often overestimated, influence on Nazism.¹⁰ In all these groups, “Templar” symbols were more or less prominent and were used side by side with other symbols of a different nature, within the frame of worldviews which differed from those of the Templar Order founded by Fabr -Palaprat.

The succession of Fabr -Palaprat’s Order of the Temple continued in Papus’s Independent Group of Esoteric Studies, and later on in its Belgian branch, KVMRIS (Ordre Kabbalistic du Rose-Croix), an organization particularly interested in sex magic.¹¹ In such environments, the neo-Templar tradition easily blended in with others (such as the neo-Pythagorean, Martinist and Rosicrucian traditions), especially since many occult orders shared the same leadership. In 1932 the Order of the Temple was legally incorporated by the Belgian group under the name of the Sovereign and Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem (OSMTJ), having as its “Regent” Th odore Covias (the number of members was considered to be too small to nominate an actual “Grand Master”). The next Regent was Emile-Cl ment Vandenberg, elected in 1935. In 1942—in the midst of World War II—the Order of the Temple agreed to pass the regency on to a member residing in the neutral country of Portugal, Antonio Campello Pinto de Sousa Fontes, who secured for the neo-Templar movement a great international propagation, opening national “pries” in almost all Western countries.

9 On the events mentioned here, see my *Il cappello del mago*, pp. 187–94. On the esoteric orders founded by Jos phin P ladan—which continue today in some forms—see *ibid.*, and Christophe Beauvils, *Jos phin P ladan 1858–1918. Essai sur une maladie du lyrisme* (Grenoble, 1993). For the history of these orders, the testimony of Count L once de Larmandie, *Notes de Psychologie Contemporaine. L’Entr’acte id al. Histoire de la Rose+Croix* (Paris, 1903), is essential reading.

10 On the history of the Order of the New Templars (ONT) and its influence on Nazism, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism* (Wellingborough, 1985).

11 Among the KVMRIS members who became neo-Templars was the scandalous knight Georges Le Cl ment de Saint-Marcq, whose ideas on sex magic are described in my *Il ritorno dello gnosticismo* (Carnago, 1993), pp. 155–60.

The Neo-Templar Orders after 1970: Schisms, Occultism, and Secret Services

In 1970 an international convention met in Paris to elect Antonio Campello Pinto de Sousa Fontes's successor as head of the OSMTJ.¹² The majority of national priories wanted to elect his son Fernando, but at the convention a turn of events caused Antoine Zdrojewski, a general of Polish origin but a French citizen and resident, to be unexpectedly elected as Regent. The 1970 convention started a rather unclear connection tying neo-Templars, secret services, and European politics. The turn of events that brought on the election of Zdrojewski was in fact due to the massive enrolment in the Sovereign and Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem by members of Service d'Action Civique (SAC), a private French right-wing organization with ties to the Gaullist party: half-way between a private secret service and a parallel police. Right after the election, Zdrojewski nominated as his *chargé de mission* Charly Lascorz, an influential member of SAC. The OSMTJ's headquarters were located on the same premises as Etudes Techniques et Commerciales (ETEC), a Paris corporation later exposed as a front for SAC. The OSMTJ, unsanctioned by any law—unlike the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, whose passports are recognized as valid by many countries—began issuing “diplomatic passports” in the name of the order, from which many members of SAC benefited. In 1972, the police—accusing ETEC of several irregularities, including possible collusions with organized crime—raided ETEC'S premises in Paris and put an end to its operations (seen by the press as a “cover” for SAC's illegal activities). As a result of the raid, in 1973 Antoine Zdrojewski put the OSMTJ's French Priory “to sleep”. The history of SAC ended with the murder of police inspector Jacques Massié (a local leader of SAC) and his family in Auriol, near Marseille, in 1981. This affair, one of the most obscure of recent French history, culminated in a court case, and in a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry, which dissolved SAC in 1982. During the trial—held in Aix-en-Provence in 1985—Jacques Massié's career within Antoine Zdrojewski's OSMTJ was brought to light. Even after the OSMTJ's official dissolution in 1973, in fact, SAC members had kept alive the order's activities, which included the trafficking of OSMTJ passports and (according to press sources) an international traffic of weapons (never fully proved) between the neo-Templars connected with SAC and the notorious Italian Masonic Lodge P2 headed by Licio Gelli (later also dissolved in Italy after a Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry).

12 On the events described in this paragraph and the next, I have based my considerations on personal interviews with members of the occult milieu in France, and on two books which include, along with interesting information, also obvious inaccuracies, and which must therefore be read cautiously: Arnaud Chaffanjon and Bertrand Galimard Flavigny, *Ordres et Contre-ordres de Chevalerie* (Paris, 1982)—which has as its main purpose the separation of the true chivalric orders of ancient and noble descent from counterfeits; and André Van Bosbeke (with Jean-Pierre De Staercke), *Chevaliers du vingtième siècle. Enquête sur les sociétés occultes et les ordres de chevalerie contemporains* (Anvers, 1988)—a journalistic survey mainly interested in the political and financial aspects of modern neo-Templarism. Both works quote extensively judicial, parliamentary and journalistic sources.

The election of Antoine Zdrojewski in 1970 also brought about a schism among the neo-Templars. Fernando Campello Pinto de Sousa Fontes declared the election invalid and proclaimed himself as Regent, as his father's successor, thus creating in almost every country at least two orders of the Temple (often sharing the same name, OMSTJ): one loyal to Sousa Fontes and one loyal to Zdrojewski. Especially important for the number of members and for international relations was the Swiss Great Priory, directed by Alfred Zappelli and recognized by Fernando Campello Pinto de Sousa Fontes. When Antoine Zdrojewski left the stage in 1973, Alfred Zappelli tried to operate from Switzerland on an international scale, and to salvage what was left of Zdrojewski's organization, establishing a French Priory dependent on the Swiss one. He then nominated as leader of the French Priory—according to press sources—Georges Michelon (also a member of SAC). At the time of the murder in Auriol, Antoine Zappelli issued a press release, clarifying that Jacques Massié had no part in his OSMTJ. During the same years Philip Guarino, an American political lobbyist, introduced himself as leader of an OSMTJ Priory in the USA. Philip Guarino was also—according to the Italian Parliamentary Commission of Inquiry on the P2 Lodge—the American “correspondent” of Licio Gelli's lodge. Perhaps it is for this reason that a file on the OSMTJ was found during one of the raids carried out by the Italian authorities at Licio Gelli's villa in Arezzo. Many “fringe” and “irregular” Freemasons belonged to an Italian Grand Priory of the OSMTJ (established, as it seems, with Alfred Zappelli's authorization) which had as *bailli* (local leader) Pasquale Gugliotta (himself a member of the P2 Lodge) and comprised, among others, Pietro Muscolo of Genoa and Luigi Savona of Turin—both leaders of “clandestine” Masonic fraternities and, according to the Parliamentary Commission, Masonic allies of Licio Gelli.¹³

At this point however, the OSMTJ loyal to Sousa Fontes or Zappelli and the remainder of Antoine Zdrojewski's OSMTJ were no longer the only two main characters of the neo-Templar scene. Almost everywhere, “independent” orders had sprung up, which—when not claiming to be receiving direct messages channeled from medieval Templars from the spirit world—produced genealogical trees which usually included both Bernard-Raymond Fabr e-Palapat and Antonio Campello Pinto de Sousa Fontes. It is perhaps also worth mentioning two branches stemming neither from Antoine Zdrojewski nor from Fernando Campello Pinto de Sousa Fontes. The first branch was established by a bizarre Spanish gentleman, Guillermo Grau, who—convinced that he was a descendant of the last Aztec Emperor, Moctezuma II—began claiming, in the 1960s, the throne of Mexico under the name of Guillermo III de Grau-Moctezuma, granting (not for free) honors, chivalric titles and even university degrees from a (mail-order) “college” in his “kingdom.” At that time a student of esoteric lore, Antonia Lopez Soler asserted that the Templars,

13 This Grand Priory did not represent the first Italian neo-Templar order. Since the nineteenth century there had been a few more, which later entered into the orbit of one of the main leaders of occult movements in Italy, Gastone Ventura (1906–81). See also his *Templari e templarismo* (Rome, 1984).

suppressed since 1307 all over Europe, had survived in Catalonia. The alleged Moctezuma enthusiastically espoused not only the theory, but also the student, changing Antonia Lopez Soler's name to Countess Moctezuma and immediately proclaiming himself Grand Master of a Catalan Branch of the OSMTJ. The Catalan Branch, founded in the 1960s, began establishing priories all over the world in the 1970s, taking advantage of the conflict between Fernando Campello Pinto de Sousa Fontes and Antoine Zdrojewski.

A second "independent" branch sprang from the mystical-esoteric experiences of Jacques Breyer, a member of the current most interested in esotericism in French Freemasonry. After these experiences, which he underwent in 1952 in the castle of Arginy, France, the French occultist came into contact with Maxime de Roquemaure, who claimed to be a descendant of a branch of the medieval Order of the Temple which had survived through the centuries not in Catalonia but in faraway Ethiopia. Breyer and de Roquemaure subsequently founded the Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple (OSTS). Some of the initial members of the OSTS founded one of the many French Masonic organizations, the National Grand Lodge of France "Opéra" (the history of which is outside the scope of this paper). The OSTS faced a crisis in 1964 following Breyer's resignation, but was reorganized twice after that, in 1966 and 1973.¹⁴ Within this order appeared most persistently apocalyptic ideas on the end of the world and the glorious return of the "Solar Christ."

Julien Origas and the Renewed Order of the Temple

The more apocalyptic neo-Templar ideas caught also the interest of Julien Origas (1920–83), who frequented other occult orders as well—including the Saint Germain Foundation in Marseille (not to be confused with the Foundation of the same name in the USA, which constitutes the organizational structure of the new religious movement called I AM Religious Activity). The French Saint Germain Foundation was led by a certain "Angela" who claimed to be a reincarnation of Socrates and Elizabeth I of England, and at the same time the mother of the Count of Saint-Germain, the eighteenth-century French occultist who never died and is still active—according to ideas common to dozens of groups of theosophical origins—in the Grand Lodge of Agartha, composed of "Ascended Masters," which secretly governs the world. Julien Origas was also a member of the world's largest Rosicrucian organization, the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), founded in the United States by Harvey Spencer Lewis (1883–1939) and extremely successful in the French-speaking countries. It is in those same French-speaking countries, in fact, that AMORC tried, in the 1970s, to gain a sort of total control of the esoteric

¹⁴ See Jean-Pierre Bayard, *La Guide des sociétés secrètes* (Paris, 1989), p. 43; Chaffanjon and Galimard Flavigny, pp. 169–71. From the OSTS also descend other present-day orders, such as the Ordre des Veilleurs du Temple in France, with corresponding parallel organizations in other countries, which have nothing to do with the developments described in the next paragraph.

community. Due to widespread interest in Martinism, for example, in order to avoid AMORC members seeking Martinist experiences elsewhere, AMORC created its own Martinist order. Around 1970, Raymond Bernard, then “Legate” of AMORC for the French-speaking countries (today he has no more ties with AMORC, but in the meantime much has changed within the international Rosicrucian community), enthusiastically embraced Julien Origas’s idea of creating a Renewed Order of the Temple (ORT)—not to be confused with the similarly named Order of the Renewed Temple joined by famous esoterist René Guénon (1886–1951) at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁵ Origas’s ORT may have offered the opportunity of keeping within AMORC fold members of the occult subculture interested in joining a neo-Templar group. It seems that the creation of the ORT was even confirmed by the apparition of a mysterious “White Cardinal” to Raymond Bernard in Rome, and that, as a result of this event, Julien Origas was crowned “King of Jerusalem” with an actual crown. For several years before the coronation, Origas had been in contact with Alfred Zappelli, and their two groups (the ORT and the Swiss Branch of the OSMTJ)—without actually coming together—had developed some common ventures, even if some strong disagreements arose soon after.¹⁶ It seems that there was also a “Secret Order” (assembling important members of the ORT and several branches of the OSMTJ), unknown to the other members, within which were formulated ideas on the imminent end of the world and on the presence on Earth of living “Ascended Masters,” including Origas and “Angela,” the leader of the Saint Germain Foundation. Members of the “Secret Order” even offered prayers “to Angela and Julien” (Origas), both destined to assume a critical role in the soon-coming universal conflagration.

Julien Origas, to say the least, did not receive good press coverage in France. Several journalists noticed his relations with neo-Nazi and White supremacist groups from half of Europe and (once again) with members of SAC. A few years later, his neo-Nazi ideas and his relations with the Saint Germain Foundation in Marseille caused his separation from AMORC. Julien Origas’s ORT continued to operate independently (undergoing, of course, several schisms), accepting ideas from Jacques Breyer’s OSTs and from “Angela” on the end of the world and on messages received directly from the Ascended Masters of the Grand Lodge of Agartha. After Julien Origas’s death in 1983, these ideas became even more odd. It was in 1981 that

15 On René Guénon’s Order of the Renewed Temple see my *Il cappello del mago*, pp. 237–8.

16 Fernando Campello Pinto de Sousa Fontes also tried to keep the OSMTJ’s priorities free from ties with controversial groups, mainly fearing the loss of independence from Masonic organizations so greatly stressed by Bernard-Raymond Fabr -Palaprat. During the second half of the 1980s a conflict arose between the Portuguese Regent and Alfred Zappelli. The majority of the Swiss Grand Priory’s members accepted the authority of de Sousa Fontes and reorganized their priory in 1988, with Joseph Clerc as Prior. Joseph Clerc’s branch is still quite strong, while Albert Zappelli, old and in poor health, keeps only a handful of followers (author’s telephone interview with Joseph Clerc, 19 October 1994).

Luc Jouret, one of the main characters in the Solar Templar tragedy, first contacted Origas's ORT.

Around 1980 all over the world there were over one hundred rival Templar orders. Today there are probably many more, and every large western city (in Italy as well as in other countries) hosts at least a couple of them. It would be a serious mistake—especially right after the October 1994 tragedy—to lump all of them together. They vary greatly, from apocalyptic associations to “cover groups” for espionage and political machinations, from organizations dealing with sex magic to others that are little more than clubs where one dresses as a Templar mainly to cultivate social and gastronomical interests (as happens in a couple of Italian organizations).

II. Luc Jouret, Joseph Di Mambro and the Solar Temple

Luc Jouret (1947–94) was born in Kikwit, Belgian Congo (present-day Zaire), to Belgian parents on 18 October 1947.¹⁷ Fear of violence against Belgian citizens at the time of decolonization persuaded his parents to settle back in their home country, where Luc enrolled in the Department of Medicine of the Free University of Brussels. In the 1970s the Belgian police opened a file on Jouret as a member of a small communist group, the Walloon Communist Youth. In 1974 he graduated as a medical doctor. In 1976 he enlisted as a paratrooper and took part in the Kolwezi raid, which allowed Belgian troops to bring back home a group of fellow citizens threatened in Zaire. The prevailing ideas among paratroopers were diametrically opposed to Luc Jouret's communism but, according to a former college mate, Marc Brunson, now a veterinarian, the young doctor asserted that, at the time, joining the paratroopers “seemed the best way to infiltrate the Army with Communist ideas.”¹⁸ After the military experience, his interests focused on alternative forms of medicine. He studied homeopathy and later became a registered homeopathic practitioner in France (in many French-speaking countries homeopathy is in fact regulated by law). In 1977 he had visited the Philippines (later he also reported visits to “China, Peru and India”) in order to study the techniques of local spiritualist healers. According to Jean-François Mayer, Jouret claimed—in a long interview he had with him in December

17 The only scholarly study on Luc Jouret and his activities, published before the tragedy, is Jean-François Mayer, “Des Templiers pour l'Ère du Verseau: les Clubs Archedia (1984–1991) et l'Ordre International Chevaleresque Tradition Solaire”, *Mouvements Religieux*, 14/153 (1993): 2–10 (summed up in Mayer, *Les Nouvelles voies spirituelles. Enquête sur la religiosité parallèle en Suisse* (Lausanne, 1993), pp. 148–9).

The Templar Tradition in the Age of Aquarius (Putney, VT, 1987), a curious book by Temple defector Gaetan Delaforge, argued that the Order of the Temple had indeed survived after the 14th century, keeping in its possession much occult knowledge, and that the International Order of Chivalry Solar Tradition (that is, Jouret's order) was its true and legitimate heir. The book was circulated in the occult-theosophical subculture, but it is obviously not a scholarly work.

18 Post et al., p. 13.

1987—that the experience in India was crucial in turning him to homeopathy, although he had been in contact with European homeopathic practitioners before.¹⁹ For a short while he supposedly became a follower of guru Krishna Macharia. In the early 1980s he started a homeopathic practice in Annemasse, France, receiving clients also from nearby Switzerland. His success as a homeopath was remarkable. People came to him from as far as the other side of the Atlantic and, after a few years, Jouret had several practices in France, Switzerland and Canada.

In the 1980s, Geneva and Montreal were perhaps the two cities with the greatest number of esoteric groups in the world. Besides continuing with his homeopathic practice, Luc Jouret also became a lecturer on naturopathy and ecological topics, active in the wider circuit of the French-speaking New Age movement. Around 1981, he established the Amenta Club, an organization managing his conferences (the name was later changed to Amenta—without “Club”—and then to Atlanta). He spoke in New Age bookstores (in France, Switzerland, Belgium and Canada) and in eclectic esoteric groups such as the Golden Way Foundation of Geneva (previously called *La Pyramide*). This had as its leader Joseph Di Mambro, 1924–94, who later became the co-founder—and largely the real leader—of the Solar Temple, while the Golden Way became, to all intents and purposes, the parent organization of the Atlanta, Amenta and later Archedia clubs and groups (see Chapter 1). In 1987, Jouret was able to be received as a paid “motivational speaker” by two district offices of Hydro-Québec, the public hydroelectric utility of the Province of Quebec. Besides getting paid 5,400 Canadian dollars for conferences in the period 1987–89, he also recruited 15 executives and managers who later followed him to the end.

Amenta was nothing but the outer shell of an actual “Chinese box” system. Those who most faithfully attended Jouret’s homeopathic practices and conferences were given an invitation to join a more confidential, although not entirely secret, “inner circle”: the Archedia Clubs, established in 1984, in which one could already find a definite ritual and an actual initiation ceremony, with a set of symbols taken from the Masonic–Templar efforts of Jacques Breyer (whose books—and one audiotape, according to Jean-François Mayer—were still being circulated). According to Canadian reporter Bill Marsden—who in 1994 interviewed some former members of the Solar Temple and whose findings have been compiled by Susan Palmer in an unpublished manuscript she kindly sent to CESNUR—Breyer personally attended meetings of the International Order of Chivalry Solar Tradition (OICTS) in Geneva in 1985: an ex-member described Origas, Breyer and Di Mambro as having been earlier “the three chums who spoke of esoteric things” in the first Templar meetings he had attended in Geneva. Jean-François Mayer also notes that in 1987 Amenta organized a seminar on Breyer’s thought. The Archedia Clubs were not yet the truly inner part of Jouret’s organization. Their most trusted members were invited to join an even more “inner” circle, one that truly was a secret organization: the

19 Luc Jouret, *Médecine et Conscience* (Montreal, 1992), p. 4; letter from Jean-François Mayer to Massimo Introvigne, 14–15 December 1994. Many thanks to Jean-François Mayer for his most helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

International Order of Chivalry Solar Tradition, in short Solar Tradition, and later to be called Order of the Solar Temple (although it is not impossible that an Order of the Solar Temple originally existed as an inner circle of the OICST). The OICST can be considered both a schism and a continuation of Julien Origas's ORT, which Jouret had joined in 1981 with the knowledge of only a few friends. Apparently former communist Luc Jouret and neo-Nazi Julien Origas understood each other very well, at least for a few months. After Origas's death, Luc Jouret tried unsuccessfully to be recognized as the ORT's leader, facing opposition from the founder's daughter, Catherine Origas: hence the 1984 schism and the establishment of the OICTS. On the other hand, some of Luc Jouret's co-workers in the Archedia Clubs, such as Joseph Di Mambro, co-founder of the OICTS, and Geneva businessman Albert Giacobino, had been members, according to press sources, of Alfred Zappelli's Sovereign and Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem²⁰ and possibly of AMORC. But according to Jouret's most secret teachings, the schism that had given birth to the OICTS was not only the mere fruit of disagreements, but was instead according to the will of the Ascended Masters of the Grand Lodge of Agartha, who had revealed themselves in 1981 (before Julien Origas's death) and had disclosed a "Plan" that was supposed to last 13 years, until the end of the world, predicted for the year 1994.

Di Mambro's and Jouret's OICTS teachings stressed the occult-apocalyptic themes of Jacques Breyer's OSTs and Julien Origas's ORT, connecting three traditions on the end of the world: (a) the idea found in some (but by no means all) New Age groups of an impending ecological catastrophe (for instance, Jouret was very insistent about the lethal nature of modern diets and food); (b) some neo-Templar movements' theory of a cosmic *renovatio* revealed by the Ascended Masters of the Grand Lodge of Agartha; (c) the political ideas of a final international *bagarre* propagated by survivalist groups both on the extreme right and on the extreme left of the political spectrum, with which Jouret had contacts in different countries. It seems that, in the years spanning from 1986 to 1993, Jouret and Di Mambro kept receiving "revelations" following Julien Origas's tradition, especially of four "sacred objects"—the Holy Grail, the sword Excalibur, the Menorah, and the Ark of the Covenant—"apparitions" of which, according to ex-members, were fabricated through electronic tricks and holograms, until it was revealed to them that between the end of 1993 and the beginning of 1994 the Earth would have been forsaken by its last "guardians": at first six "entities" hidden in the Great Pyramid of Egypt, and later—but this could have been a metaphor used for a spiritual experience of three leaders of the Temple—three Ascended Masters who had received a revelation on the end of this cycle near Ayers Rock (now Uluru), Australia (a country in which the Temple had in the meantime established itself).

20 This information is also denied by Joseph Clerc, Grand Prior of the Swiss OSMTJ loyal to Sousa Fontes, who states that Joseph Di Mambro had only casual relations with Alfred Zappelli, without ever becoming a fully fledged member of the OSMTJ (author's telephone interview with Joseph Clerc, 19 October 1994).

Luc Jouret was able to keep up his speaking engagements on the New Age circuit as long as the existence of a secret order with peculiar ideas on the end of the world was well hidden behind the different Amenta, Atlanta, and Archedia groups and clubs. When some curious journalists and the unavoidable disgruntled ex-members started to talk about the Solar Temple, the doors shut. The Archedia Clubs dissolved in 1991, and various European New Age bookstores had by this time begun refusing to host Luc Jouret's conferences. There remained, however, a solid operation in Canada, where Jouret and Joseph Di Mambro spent a great deal of their time from 1986 onward, and where they had founded a Club Archedia de Science et Tradition International. Under the Atlanta and Archedia Clubs' labels, Luc Jouret could thus keep up his conferences—on topics such as The Sphinx, Christ, and the New Man—in Quebec (and it seems even at the University of Quebec at Montreal) in the years 1991 and 1992. Motivational classes were offered to companies under the aegis of an Académie pour la Recherche et la Connaissance des Hautes Sciences (ARCHS), whose literature was printed by Editions Atlanta. The “Chinese box” system continued in Canada, to where Solar Temple members from Switzerland, France and Martinique had also moved. According to the Marsden interviews compiled by Susan Palmer, ex-members claimed in 1994 that in 1991, 11 members of the Solar Temple were brought to Canada from Martinique in order to increase the French “female” energy in Quebec and further balance the English “male” energy there. The order's headquarters were located in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, in a historic boarding school purchased on 26 October 1984 from the Catholic Brothers of the Sacred Heart, for 235,000 Canadian dollars. In the 1990s the house was the property of the Association pour l'Etude et la Recherche en Science de Vie Québec, and of the Société Agricole 81. In fact, “Science of Life” (*Science de Vie*) was often the topic of Luc Jouret's conferences, as he blamed many of the world's ills on today's poor diet, suggesting as an alternative “naturally grown” products. The house in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade was also a center for the production of “natural” food products, partly marketed through an “ecological” bread shop, the Boulangerie Aliments Naturels. Another Solar Temple center was established in 1992 in Saint-Sauveur, in a luxurious house on Rue Laffleur, bought for 450,000 Canadian dollars. A PO Box address and a bank account were kept in Charlesbourg, another small Quebec town. In Morin Heights, a mountainous area, were the two villas which served as personal residences for Luc Jouret and Joseph Di Mambro, with apartments for two other Temple leaders, Camille Pilet and Dominique Bellaton. Focusing on Canada and communal living meant a decrease in the number of devotees. In 1992–93 only the “hard core” of about one hundred members of the Solar Temple was left, as opposed to the international membership in the 1980s of about 200–300 people.

On 8 March 1993, a crucial episode in the history of the Solar Temple occurred in Canada. Two Temple members, 54-year-old Jean Pierre Vinet, engineer and project manager for Hydro-Québec, and 45-year-old insurance broker Hermann Delorme, were arrested attempting to buy three semiautomatic guns with silencers, illegal weapons in Canada. Daniel Tougas, a police officer of Cowansville and a Temple member, was temporarily suspended from office on charges of having helped the

two. On 9 March, Judge François Doyon of Montreal committed them to trial, freeing them on parole. Luc Jouret—who according to police reports asked the two to buy the weapons—was also committed to trial, and an arrest warrant was issued against him. (The Temple leader could not be found, as he was in Europe at the time.) The event drew the attention of the Canadian press to what newspapers called “the cult of the end of the world.” Rose-Marie Klaus, the estranged Swiss wife of one of the members, took advantage of the situation, calling for a press conference on 10 March, in which she denounced sex magic practices and the economic exploitation of members. On the same day, another press conference was held in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade. Sitting beside Jean-Marie Horn, President of the Association pour l’Etude et la Recherche en Science de Vie Québec, and Didier Quèze, Solar Temple spokesman, was the town’s mayor, Gilles Devault, who declared that the Temple “never caused any trouble” but, on the contrary, “contributed to the development of the community.” “A cult? ” Not at all, said the mayor, “Their children take part in the town’s amusements, they play hockey. Actually I believe that they are people that give a very positive contribution.”²¹ Even the reporters most inclined to sensationalism could not find any hostility between this Quebec town and the Solar Temple, and recounted that “residents of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade [who] met yesterday [10 March 1993] do not seem to have any grievances towards members of the Order.”²² Rose-Marie Klaus was considered an unreliable fanatic, and even the local parish priest, Father Maurice Cossette, admitted that, true, they were not Catholics, but he let them “advertise their conferences on nutrition and health on the church bulletin,” as long as they didn’t “talk about Apocalypse.”²³ Later on, the Solar Temple’s lawyer, Jacques Rochelle, hinted of a “schism” that would have happened “more or less” in 1990, during which the Canadian members supposedly left Di Mambro and Jouret. Allegedly also Hermann Delorme and Jean-Pierre Vinet “had left the Order several months before” their arrest.²⁴ It is unclear whether this information represented a simple attempt to sidetrack the investigations, or if tension within the Order of the Solar Temple actually existed. In any case, the official leader of the Canadian Branch in March 1993, Robert Falardeau, head of a minor department at the Quebec Ministry of Finance, died in October 1994 with Luc Jouret and Joseph Di Mambro.

A few days after the arrests, the press started to reduce the intensity of its attacks on the Solar Temple, asking the police for clarifications. Police officials were then forced to reveal that the operations against the Solar Temple were not motivated simply by a desire to emulate their American colleagues at that time engaged in the siege of the Branch Davidians’ ranch in Waco, Texas. On 23 November 1992, a man

21 See Yves Boisvert, “L’Ordre du Temple Solaire n’a pas l’air de beaucoup déranger Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade”, *La Presse* (Montreal), 11 March 1993.

22 Denis Bolduc, “Les membres de l’Ordre nient vouloir importer des armes”, *Le Journal de Québec*, 11 March 1993.

23 Boisvert, “L’Ordre du Temple Solaire”.

24 Norman Provencher, “L’Ordre du Temple Solaire se dit victime de diffamation”, *Le Soleil*, 12 March 1993; Martin Pelchat, “Jouret avait été écarté de l’Ordre du temple solaire”, *La Presse* (Montreal), 18 March 1993.

identifying himself as “André” had phoned four Canadian members of parliament on behalf of a mysterious group, Q-37 (so called—according to “André”—because it had 37 members, all from Quebec), announcing the impending murder of Quebec’s Minister of the Interior, Claude Ryan, found “guilty” of adopting a political line too favorable to the claims of Native Americans. Reports by some informers—perhaps members of the Canadian intelligence services—to the Quebec police, stating that the group Q-37 was tied to the Solar Temple, prompted the investigations which culminated in the entrapment of two Temple members who tried to buy illegal weapons from a person who turned out to be a police agent. Police authorities had to admit, however, that in five months of investigations they had not been able to find any proof of ties between the Q-37 group and the Solar Temple (except for the Solar Temple’s hostility toward Native Americans, which came from Julien Origas’s White supremacist ideas). In fact, they could not even find any proof that a Q-37 group actually existed. Since this was about all the information the Quebec police could offer (apart from a wire-tapping report relating how Luc Jouret advised a member of the group to practice shooting with a pistol—advice justified by his lawyers because of the need for self-defense in the isolated Swiss centres), at the 30 June 1993 court proceedings in Montreal, Hermann Delorme and Jean-Pierre Vinet pleaded guilty only to having bought illegal weapons—justified again by reasons of self-defense—and were freed with the local formula of “suspended acquittal”, with a fine of 1,000 Canadian dollars each to be given to the Red Cross. Judge Jean-Pierre Bonin justified the decision, stating that

[the accused] have until now been victims of biases and bigotry which have become tremendously widespread through this event’s coverage; they have been regarded as members of a cult, and cults were not very popular in the media at the time of these events, especially due to the incident in Waco.²⁵

On 15 July—discreetly and without the previous knowledge of the media—Luc Jouret returned to Montreal to answer in court the same accusations and to obtain his own “suspended acquittal”—under the same conditions as Hermann Delorme and Jean-Pierre Vinet. Meanwhile, in Quebec, three institutions were concerned about connections their officers and employees had with a “cult”: the police (which had convicted officer Daniel Tougas, paroled him and expelled him from its ranks); Hydro-Québec (which nominated an investigation commission that verified how 22 employees had participated in the activities of the Solar Temple and 15 were actual members of it, advising Hydro-Québec to refrain in the future from hosting occult-religious “motivational” conferences), and the Ministry of Finance (which sent Chief of Department Robert Falardeau on leave for one week, then let him slip quietly back into office). The tempest seemed to end smoothly, even if on 17 March 1994, a letter signed “Order of the Solar Temple” was found in Montreal, in which the order claimed responsibility for an attack against a Hydro-Québec tower in Saint-Basile-

25 Richard Hetu and Martin Pelchat, “Le Juge absout deux ex-membres de l’Ordre du temple solaire”, *La Presse*, 8 July 1993.

Le-Grand on 24 February. The police questioned the authenticity of the letter as it mentioned only the Saint-Basile-Le-Grand attack and not another one committed the same day against a Hydro-Québec installation in the Native American reserve of Kahnawake but kept secret by the authorities (which, however, had obviously been known to the attackers).²⁶ The Canadian incident later appeared to be extremely significant in the final crisis of the Solar Temple.

III. The Tragedy

It will take months, perhaps years, to find out exactly how the events developed during the first week of October 1994. The most essential information has been extensively covered in the world media. On 30 September, nine people, including Luc Jouret, had dinner at the Bonivard Hotel in Veytaux (in the Vaud canton, Switzerland). On 3 October, Joseph Di Mambro was seen having lunch with others at the Saint-Christophe Restaurant in Bex (same canton). On 4 October a fire destroyed Joseph Di Mambro's villa in Morin Heights, Canada. Among the ruins, the police found five charred bodies, one of which was a child's. At least three of these people seemed to have been stabbed to death before the fire. In Salvan (Valais canton, Switzerland), Luc Jouret and Joseph Di Mambro asked a blacksmith to change the lock in their chalet, and bought several plastic bags. On 5 October, at 1:00 a.m., a fire started in one of the centers of the Solar Temple in Switzerland, the Ferme des Rochettes, near Cheiry, in the canton of Fribourg—which was also a center for natural agriculture—owned by Albert Giacobino, who, as mentioned earlier, was an associate of Joseph Di Mambro in several esoteric and neo-Templar activities. The police found 23 bodies, one of which was a child's, in a room converted into a temple. Among the corpses was Albert Giacobino's. Some of the victims were killed by gunshots, while many others were found with their heads inside plastic bags. The same day, at 3:00 a.m., three chalets inhabited by members of the Solar Temple caught fire almost simultaneously at Les Granges-sur-Salvan, in the Valais canton. In the charred remains were found 25 bodies, along with remainders of devices programmed to start the fires (such devices were also found at Morin Heights and at Cheiry), and the pistol which shot the 52 bullets destined for the people found dead in Cheiry. On 6 October, Swiss historian Jean-François Mayer, secretary of the International Committee of CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions)—the scholar who in 1987 had conducted a participant observation of the Archedia Clubs—received a package mailed from Geneva on 5 October (in the space for the sender it said simply "D.part," meaning "departure" in French). The package included four documents summing up the ideology of the Solar Temple and explaining what had happened that night, together with an article extracted from the *American Executive Intelligence Review* as republished in *Nexus* on the Randy

26 See Bernard Plante, "L'Ordre du temple solaire serait impliqué", *Le Devoir*, 18 March 1994.

Weaver incident.²⁷ Other copies of the package, or parts of it, were also sent to some Swiss newspapers. On 8 October, in Aubignan, France, the police discovered, in a building owned by a member of the Solar Temple, a deactivated device which could have burned down the house, similar to the ones found in Switzerland and Canada. On 9 October, the French Minister of the Interior, Charles Pasqua, received in Paris the passports of Joseph Di Mambro and his wife Jocelyne (both already identified among the victims of the Swiss fire). The sender's name on the envelope was that of a "Tran Sit Corp." in Zurich. Canadian television announced the same day that, according to their investigations, Joseph Di Mambro used the Solar Temple as a cover for weapons smuggling and for money-laundering, and had huge bank funds in Australia. The figures allegedly involved in this traffic (millions of dollars), which supposedly corresponded with those of the Australian bank account, were however drastically reduced by the Swiss prosecutors. On 13 October, the Swiss police stated that, among the charred bodies they had identified without a doubt that of Luc Jouret (whom many thought had escaped), and to have recognized Patrick Vuarnet (a young member of the Solar Temple and son of former Olympic ski champion and president of a multinational fashion firm, Jean Vuarnet) as the "mailman" who had sent the documents to Jean-François Mayer and the passports to French Minister Charles Pasqua following instructions from Joseph Di Mambro.

IV. Elements for an Interpretation

Suicide and/or murder? We can find some answers—if we know how to search for them beyond the esoteric jargon and without barring the possibility that they could also include some information aimed at sidetracking—in the four documents sent to Jean-François Mayer (whom we thank for passing them on to the CESNUR network promptly). The explanation includes a suicide and two types of murder. According to the documents, some especially advanced members of the order are able to understand that—as the cycle started by the Grand Lodge of Sirius or of Agartha in 1981 is completed—it is time to move on to a superior stage of life. It is "not a suicide in the human sense of the term," but a deposition of their human bodies to receive immediately new invisible, glorious and "solar" ones. With these new bodies, they now operate in another dimension, unknown to the uninitiated, presiding over the dissolution of the world and waiting for an esoteric "*redintegratio*." There is also another class of less advanced members of the Solar Temple who cannot understand that in order to take on the "solar body" one must "depose" the mortal one. The documents imply that these members must be helped to perform their "transition" (in other words, must be "helped" to die) in the least violent way possible. Lastly, the documents state that within the Temple's membership were also found backsliders and traitors, actively helping the arch enemies of the Solar

27 In this incident in Idaho in the 1990s the FBI surrounded the home of a white separatist, Randy Weaver. An FBI sniper killed Weaver's wife, resulting in a major scandal for the bureau.

Temple: the government of Quebec and Opus Dei. To them the documents promise “just retribution” (in other words, murder, without the cautions used with the less advanced members). According to a survivor, Thierry Huguenin—whose last-minute escape was apparently responsible for reducing the casualties to 53—Jouret and Di Mambro had planned that exactly 54 victims should die in order to secure an immediate magical contact with the spirits of 54 Templars burned at the stake in the fourteenth century.²⁸

This scenario may seem consistent with the different ways in which the victims in Switzerland and in Canada died, and with the results of the investigations, which seem to indicate that the murders in Morin Heights and Cheiry were carried out by two members of the Temple, Joel Egger and Dominique Bellaton (a manicurist-turned socialite through a sequel of love affairs with businessmen, well known in Geneva and in the ski resort of Avoriaz), who later joined the other leaders in the suicidal act in Les Granges-sur-Salvan. In Morin Heights two Swiss members, Colette and Gerry Genoud, may have committed suicide, while Antonio and Nicky Dutoit were savagely murdered with their three-month-old son Emmanuel. According to the Quebec police report of November 1994, the Dutoits were also included in the traitors’ list because they had named their son Emmanuel. The report argues that Di Mambro’s daughter Emmanuelle—whom Nicky Dutoit had been babysitting and whose mother was Dominique Bellaton—was regarded as the “cosmic child,” an exalted being with a precious future. By calling their son Emmanuel the Dutoits had usurped the unique position of Emmanuelle Di Mambro, the “cosmic child,” and had in fact transformed their baby son into the Antichrist. Hence, according to the Quebec police, the particularly elaborate ritual used for killing baby Emmanuel Dutoit and his parents.

On the other hand, there seems to be a contradiction between the first three documents and the fourth one. From the first three documents it seems that the tragedy was prearranged, as part of the Grand Lodge of Sirius’s “Plan,” and as a preparation for the end of the world, which is at any rate impending for all humanity. The fourth document—on a more “political” note—presents the suicide as an act of protest against persecution by the government of Quebec, which the document accuses of “mass murder,” finding a parallel with the activities of the US authorities in Waco and with other episodes of violent repression of new religious movements by police or government authorities. Perhaps the contradiction is only apparent if we interpret the Canadian incidents of 1993 as the instigating force leading to the final stage of an apocalyptic itinerary which actually began a long time ago. The Quebec police report of November 1994 claims that, although no evidence of weapon trafficking by the Solar Temple exists to date, the police action taken in 1993 in fact prevented a mass suicide-cum-homicide taking place in Saint-Sauveur, Canada, at least one year before the October 1994 tragedy, and may thus have saved some lives.

28 The story of a survivor (with true names hiding behind pseudonyms) is told by Thierry Huguenin, *Le 54e* (Paris, 1995).

After the tragedy of October 1994, a faulty interpretation spread widely among the international press, and most probably among the general public. The Solar Temple incident was compared to earlier events—from Jonestown, Guyana to Waco—and was simply blamed, once more, on the “danger of the cults.” Sociologically speaking, however, one can immediately notice a difference. The victims of Jonestown and Waco (two events which are already very different from one another) all belonged to low economic strata (unemployed young people, unskilled workers, low-salary employees facing difficulties), as is the case with the members of many Christian-apocalyptic (or, in the case of Jonestown, political-apocalyptic) new religious movements. If we run through the list of the identified victims of the Swiss fires, we immediately notice a different picture. It is perhaps enough to read the names of the victims (some of whom we have already mentioned): Robert Falardeau, chief of a department of the Ministry of Finance of Quebec; Joyce-Lyne Grand’Maison, a reporter for the daily *Journal de Québec*, who worked for eight years as contributing editor for the financial page; Camille Pilet, recently retired as international sales manager of the Swiss multinational watch corporation Piaget (who was in the process of launching his own brand of designer watches); Robert Ostiguy, mayor of Richelieu, Quebec; Albert Giacobino, businessman in Geneva. For a sociologist, this is not a typical list of members of a “cult” or a new religious movement. The media comparisons with the Jehovah’s Witnesses or The Family could be humorous if we were not talking about a tragedy. The high-ranking government officer, the financial reporter, the multinational manager, the mayor are all types of people one expects to find enlisted not in a new religious movement, but rather in a club or fraternity. The anticult movements have tried to exploit the Solar Temple tragedy to attack the “cults” in general and to launch campaigns against The Family, Scientology and even Jehovah’s Witnesses or Hare Krishnas, which are, on the contrary, religious movements and must be carefully distinguished—from a sociological and doctrinal viewpoint—from occult-esoteric groups such as the Solar Temple. As Jean-François Mayer has noted, the structure of the Solar Temple may recall, for some, features of new religious movements. On the other hand, as I have argued elsewhere, “new magical movements” share some external features with new religious movements but should not be confused with the latter since the experience they offer is inherently different.²⁹ Even the expectation of the end of this world by Christian-based groups, such as The Family or the Jehovah’s Witnesses (as well as by millions of pre-millennialists in the evangelical Protestant world), does not resemble the expectation of destruction and of magical reconstruction of the members’ and of the world’s

29 Letter from Jean-François Mayer to Massimo Introvigne, 14–15 December 1994. For the differences between new magical movements (NMMs) and new religious movements (NRMs) see my *Il cappello del mago*. This difference—and the category of NMMs—has been acknowledged in a paper on NRMs by the Roman Catholic Church, the general report of Francis Cardinal Arinze at the Extraordinary Consistory of 1991, and is implied in Raphaël Aubert and Carl A. Keller, *Vie et mort de l’Ordre du Temple Solaire* (Vevey, 1994).

destiny, as found in the magical-esoteric views of the Solar Temple and similar groups.

An acceptable interpretation of the Solar Temple tragedy must be reached on two levels, which are not mutually exclusive. The first level must necessarily consider the odd intrigues between secret services, more or less “deviant” clandestine lodges and Templar organizations in recent neo-Templar history. Both the elderly Joseph Di Mambro and the younger Luc Jouret took part in orders such as Julien Origas’s Renewed Order of the Temple, and the Sovereign and Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem (in several of their controversial branches, not to be confused with others with similar or even the same names) long enough to enter into the orbit of influence of groups whose ties with the French SAC, with the Italian P2 Lodge and with several countries’ secret services seem probable in view of court and parliamentary findings. The fact that Joseph Di Mambro’s and his wife’s passports were sent to French Minister Charles Pasqua—who, according to the French media, was once linked to SAC—is, in this context, a strange coincidence (or perhaps a warning). Even more puzzling is the way some information of yet unclear origins provoked the Quebec police to attack the Solar Temple in 1993, thus exacerbating its apocalyptic fears.

The second level, referring to grounds more familiar to sociologists than the world—certainly more obscure to them—of secret services and political intrigues, takes into consideration the specific nature of the apocalyptic current within the magical-esoteric universe. The vision of a “*renovatio*,” or a total renewal of the world—which frequently adopts as its symbols fire and death—is typical of an occult tradition which, though a minority trend in the world of magical-esoteric groups, seems to be growing in importance at the end of the second millennium. This occult tradition—which, unlike the new religious movements, appeals mostly to middle-aged people from a good social background who generally elude to Christian beliefs and religion in their traditional meanings—usually maintains a metaphorical relation with the symbols of fire and death and, more generally speaking, with the idea of the destruction of the present world. The Solar Temple episode, however, proves that it is not impossible for small, fringe sections of the apocalyptic current within the magical-esoteric milieu to live the ideology of destruction to tragic and extreme consequences.

Chapter 3

Purity and Danger in the Solar Temple¹

Susan J. Palmer

Based on research conducted in Quebec, this study explores the shape of the social life, apocalyptic ideology and authority structure of l'Ordre du Temple Solaire (OTS) or Solar Temple within the framework of Mary Douglas's typology of "group and grid." The pollution fears and purity rituals of this controversial new religious movement are analyzed as an important factor in their decision to orchestrate a religiously motivated mass suicide/homicide, explained in their suicide documents as a "transit" (a magical feat of soul travel) to the star Sirius. Douglas's insights into how the human body becomes a "natural symbol" for small, persecuted groups, mirroring the social body and the vulnerability of its exits and entrances vis-à-vis the surrounding culture, are applied to the alternative patterns of sexuality and parenting in the OTS. It is suggested that the magical aspect of the mass suicide expressed a concern for purity and for protecting the boundaries of their community. It is also suggested that the ritual homicides in Morin Heights resemble the "witch-hunts" characteristic of Douglas's "small society" that conceives of itself as the perfect, impermeable vessel.

Introduction

On 4 and 5 October 1994, 53 people suffered a violent death, all of them members (or former members) of a magical-esoteric religion, l'Ordre du Temple Solaire (OTS), also known as the Solar Temple. This ritual mass suicide/homicide was staged using bombs and other incendiary devices in three locations—Quebec in Canada, and in Cheiry and Salvan in Switzerland. Most of the Templars were drugged and shot before the fires exploded.

A set of four "suicide" letters (the "Testaments") were distributed to Swiss scholar Jean-François Mayer and to selected newspapers. These explained the group's "otherworldly" rationale for dying *en masse* as a "transit to Sirius" or magical feat of soul travel, empowering members to assume their glorious "solar bodies" on the star Sirius. The media and police continued, nevertheless, to investigate the OTS as a criminal organization suspected of money-laundering and international arms smuggling. Anticult officials made facile comparisons between OTS's charismatic

¹ This chapter originally appeared in the *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 11/3 (1996): 303–18.

recruiter, Luc Jouret, and David Koresh. The *real* charismatic leader, however, was soon identified by the Swiss police in November 1994, as Joseph Di Mambro, the 70-year-old Grand Master in Switzerland.

The Sûreté du Québec then closed the case, but the Swiss delayed until 3 April 1996 before reporting the results of the inquest. Swiss magistrate André Piller sorted the dead into the three categories already laid out in the “Testaments,” but gave them numbers: 15 true suicides, he claimed, were committed by the core group who called themselves “the Awakened”; 30 members, “the Immortals,” were trapped unwittingly in a ritual “suicide” through sedatives and bullets in the head; and seven “traitors” were executed. The magistrate identified the perpetrators of these crimes as Di Mambro and his appointed executioners, and called it “a long-planned apocalypse” (*Globe and Mail*, 4 April 1996: A1).

Many secrets remain hidden, and the meaning of this esoteric religion’s violent act is still obscure. For scholars, the aftermath of a sensational “cult mass suicide” presents an uninviting research field. Impediments to data collection are many and include the vows of secrecy required of Templars, the legally privileged nature of much of the evidence, and the stigma borne by the “survivors” who are understandably reluctant to be identified. The OTS was a secret society, and only the leaders were privy to its revisions in prophecy and decision-making procedures that contributed to their final morbid choice. Many false or unverifiable trails have been laid: second-hand testimonies are traded by journalists, ghost-written apostate memoirs are in progress and conspiracy theories abound.²

One docudrama is focusing on the (alleged) connections of the OTS with the Mafia and P2 terrorists; another documentary extrapolates on the notion that Luc Jouret lives(!)³ A local Templar suggested that the murders in Morin Heights were perpetrated by the CIA to cover up President Carter’s dirty deal with a delegation of extraterrestrials who built a subterranean laboratory in the Nevada desert. Another has argued that the original magical suicide had been desecrated by the Sûreté du Québec who rearranged the evidence to frame OTS leaders as murderers.⁴

While formulating a moral to the tragedy of l’Ordre du Temple Solaire is beyond the scope of this study, it is possible to derive some insights into how the very shape of this small society may have contributed to the tragedy. The essay in hermeneutics that follows makes use of the theories developed by Mary Douglas (1966, 1973). I propose that her theories are useful for analyzing the internal factors and external

2 Through trading data over the telephone, I became aware of a fierce competition between the French and anglophone newspapers (“It’s a French sect!”) and of journalists claiming a national treasure (“It’s a Quebec suicide—those American journalists will steal our story and sell it to Hollywood!”). I was told 15 books by “survivors” are in progress, and have been interviewed (while trying to interview) by two docudrama producers and one documentary film director.

3 I am indebted to Peter Pearson and David Cohen, television filmmakers, for communicating this information.

4 Personal communication. It is difficult to determine whether these theories are idiosyncratic or collectively held beliefs.

pressures that helped rationalize the core group's decision to resort to "magical" violence.

Douglas makes two points that are useful for this undertaking: first, that the human body is conceptualized as a set of symbols by its particular society. In small, persecuted minority groups, she notes, the perceived and/or actual threat to the social body tends to be acted out in purity rituals that govern the exits and entrances of the human body, and reorder its viscous bodily fluids, thereby enhancing the collective's social control over the individual (Douglas 1966). This serves the vital function of preventing the tribe's assimilation into the larger, surrounding society. Douglas then addresses the task of finding "some relation between cosmological ideas and characteristics of social relationships" (Douglas 1973: 84) and proposes a four-part typology for analyzing societies, based on the variables of *grid* (the clarity of a group's meaning system) and *group* (a society's degree of social cohesion and control) as a tool for measuring the strength/weakness of various societies' belief systems and collective identities.

Douglas describes the "strong group, weak grid" type as a claustrophobic, paranoid society:

The members know each other and can count their ranks, hemmed ... in with intrigue and jealousy ... contradictory rewards and ... impossible goals. They put immense pressure on each other and strive incessantly to define and close their circle of friends. (1973: 88)

Where social control is strong, but the belief system is weak, she argues, we tend to find "a dualistic cosmology that reckons with the power of demons and their allies; justice is not seen to prevail" (Douglas 1973: 91). *L'Ordre du Temple Solaire* fits this category, for it was a society that exerted powerful pressure on individuals, but had a rather vague and confusing classification system.

In a manner similar to the ancient gnostic schools, the OTS lacked a normative theology, but used the interpretive method of allegory and symbolism to refine its own ideas under the cloak of existing traditional traditions (Rudolph 1987: 54). This method of "protest exegesis" has been denounced by heresiologists as parasitical, but has been vaunted for its psychological sophistication by students of mysticism like C.G. Jung. Thus, while OTS theology contains the abstract of gnostic tenets (Jonas 1963: 42), it was highly eclectic. Members dabbled in occult subjects ranging from Rosicrucianism to Egyptian thanatology to Luc Jouret's oriental folk medicine and ecological apocalypticism. Experts in various schools of the occult, like the astrologer Marilou Saint-Aignan, and the Jungian alchemist and orchestral conductor Michel Tabachnik, were periodically invited to give workshops. There was no coherent syncretizing curriculum, and the approach to *gnosis* was experiential. Mists of tasteful hermeneutics carefully obscured the more striking doctrines, such as reincarnation and the tutelary presence of a White Brotherhood. This aesthetic, elitist and "unfundamentalist" approach seemed to attract a clientèle of predominantly middle-aged, prosperous and highly cultured professionals.

History and Social Organization

Introvigne states that the OTS is but one atypical example of the magical-esoteric movement known as the Knights Templar. He notes that “around 1980 there were over one hundred rival Templar orders worldwide ... from apocalyptic associations to cover groups for espionage ... from ... sex magic to ... clubs where one dresses as a Templar mostly to cultivate ... social and gastronomic interests” (Introvigne 1995a: 273).

Luc Jouret and Joseph Di Mambro were established Grand Masters in the Knights Templar tradition and had collaborated in organizing workshops since 1976. In 1984 they entered into a more formal relationship by establishing l’Ordre International Chevaleresque de Tradition Solaire (OICTS) in Geneva, from whence the OTS emerged. Di Mambro, born in 1924, was trained in the Rosicrucian tradition (AMORC), and became leader of La Pyramide which became later, in 1974, the Golden Way in Geneva. A man of romantic and expensive tastes, he was fascinated by ancient Egyptian mythology, loved the opera and claimed to be an adept in sex magic.

Jouret became their star speaker, and brought charismatic claims and gifts of his own to the Order. Born in the Belgian Congo in 1947, he was a successful homeopathic doctor with practices in Switzerland and Quebec. He organized over 200 conferences in France and Quebec to communicate his broad interests in alternative medicine. In 1983 he joined l’Ordre Renové du Temple (ORT) and, when its founder Julien Origas died, he briefly assumed the leadership, but was expelled by Origas’s daughter Catherine, after a struggle over the leadership and funds. He then formed a schismatic group with 30 ORT Templars, and became their Grand Master, opening branches in Martinique and Quebec (Mayer 1993). A series of public organizations orbited around the OTS functioning rather like “Chinese boxes” (Mayer 1993; Introvigne 1995a). The Clubs Amenta offered seminars on health and natural foods, and the Clubs Atlanta and Archedia were a forum for Luc Jouret’s recruiting and fundraising talents. Gifted and committed members would be invited to join the inner circle of the OTS. It was hierarchical and involved three levels of initiation. Frères du Parvis, Chevaliers de l’Alliance and Frères des Temps Anciens, (Mayer 1993).

Jacques Breyer, French esoteric author and founder of the Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple in 1952, was a spiritual mentor and a strong presence in the Swiss OTS. One Quebec member who met him in Switzerland in 1985 described him as “*un gentilhomme désaxé*” (eccentric) and recalled seeing Breyer, Julien Origas and Di Mambro, as “the constant threesome” who hung out together at the Geneva temple in the early days: “the three chums who spoke of esoteric things.”⁵

The treasurer of the order was Camille Pilet (1926–94), a wealthy corporate manager for Piaget and former member of AMORC. The main administrators were

5 William Marsden of the *Montréal Gazette* conducted this interview.

Di Mambro's wife Jocelyne, his former mistress, Odile Dancet, and his old friend, Françoise Belanger (Introvigne, Chapter 2 this volume; Centre Roger Ikor, 1995)

The order was small, numbering between 300 and 400 core members at its peak. Extraordinary demands were placed on core members, but there were varying levels of involvement, and most remained on the fringes of the group without making undue sacrifices. In Quebec, members donated as little as \$90 per month, although others contributed \$350.⁶ A commune was established in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, Quebec, which demanded a high investment of money and voluntary labor to operate their businesses: the bakery, gardening, farm, the school, a printing press and administrative work.

The OTS offered members a spiritual path, elegant social gatherings, occult study sessions, personal counseling and therapeutic work. There was a high attrition rate in the outer clubs, but initiation into the OTS required vows of secrecy, and apostate Rosemary Klaus claims that death threats were directed toward potential defectors—probably an exaggerated reading of the dire consequences of betrayal implied in the ritual vows of secrecy. Paradoxically, a high value was placed (at least in theory) on individualism and free choice.

The OTS evolved an elaborate ritual life that drew upon traditional esoteric symbols, but made use of modern technology—and possibly hallucinogenic drugs—to enhance the individual's experience.⁷ Ceremonies were held in medieval robes under the full moon. The epiphany that formed the climax of the ritual at the underground Sanctuaire at Salvan was a hologram of the Holy Grail. Lasers, slides, sound and lighting effects were employed to create illusions of the Masters of the White Brotherhood, lightning storms, divine music and gold dust. These devices were a secret shared by a select core group, and served to bolster Joseph Di Mambro's charismatic claims and the belief in the tutelary presence of the White Brotherhood.

The Geneva Templars would occasionally stage operas: members would dress up as characters, make the sets, hold lengthy rehearsals, and perform the works of Wagner, Verdi or Puccini, miming the arias to CDs playing in the background, complete with dramatic gestures. These performances would be videotaped. Joseph Di Mambro and his circle once flew to Manhattan for the weekend to attend an opera at the Met.⁸

Leadership

Authority patterns in the OTS were unspecified and constantly shifting. Formal offices were established – president, secretary, treasurer – but members interviewed

6 William Marsden of the *Montréal Gazette* provided this information.

7 One member claimed they drank coffee before entering the Temple and was convinced it contained some mind-altering substance.

8 Peter Pearson's researchers for his docudrama collected this story.

stressed the notion of the communion of souls and denied that there was a hierarchical model. One Templar claimed:

I was the leader, anyone could be the leader. You know the planets? Some are close to the sun, Mercury is the closest, and some are further out. ... And yet each planet has their fixed course, and it was like that with us. Everyone has a role to play, we are all important.⁹

The OTS as a social organization corresponds to the “body politic” of a “small group” that tends to have a clear external boundary, but a confused internal state in which “envy and favouritism flourish and continually confound the proper expectations of members.” Joseph Di Mambro would tell a member that he (the member) was the reincarnation of one of the Apostles. The very next day he would say, “I was mistaken, it is not you, it is him,” indicating another member. He would invite certain people into the inner sanctum to watch the light and sound illusion. They would come out reporting, “It was marvellous! I can’t tell you what I saw!” The next time they would be excluded and others would be invited.¹⁰

There is considerable disagreement concerning Luc Jouret’s authority in the group. Some felt he was appointed as Di Mambro’s successor, but Huguenin (1995) claims that he was appointed, and insists that Jouret was “just like us.”¹¹ Others offered testimonials to Jouret’s extraordinary charisma. Former Rosicrucians from AMORC say they joined the OTS because Jouret “captivated” them in his speeches. One man said, “He put his finger on my forehead and I experienced an energy, a sharing of knowledge! Afterwards I felt relaxed and joyful.” A woman recalled, “At one point Jouret looked at me. It was like his third eye penetrated my body. It was a loving sensation of kindness. Then he crossed his arms, cut the spell and went on to the next person.”¹²

Rosemary Klaus, a hostile ex-member, described the profound effect Jouret had on her husband when they first joined the OTS: “I think it was like falling in love with someone.” She described ritual events that fit Kanter’s (1972) model of a “mortification mechanism.” Jouret, dressed as a priest, would walk around the room, praising or criticizing individuals. “If Jouret was severely critical ... the lights in the room would flash off and on.”

As a homeopathic doctor, Jouret apparently used some of the tricks common to shamans: “It’s lucky you came to me when you did!” he told one patient who consulted him on a minor ailment. “You had cancer, and I’ve just cured it!”¹³

While Jouret was an inspiring preacher, he seemed to be a clumsy pastor. Quebec Templars complained about his insensitive handling of people in the Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade commune, and after 1987, his charisma was waning: “When I saw Jouret in ’91, I saw there was a change in him.” In contrast, two Quebec Templars

9 Templar interviewed in the Bar St Manoir, Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, Quebec.

10 Personal communication.

11 Personal communication.

12 William Marsden’s interview notes.

13 Personal communication.

expressed a deep and abiding admiration for “Jo” (Joseph Di Mambro) who “was a different case” from Jouret: “In 1984 I met him, he was maybe one of the last conscious persons on earth. He moved with the forces, it was that simple. I don’t like to use the word ‘power’.” In contrast to Jouret’s crude manipulations, Di Mambro’s spiritual authority was perceived as subtle and understated—“a fountain of truth, but in conversation, not by preaching.”¹⁴

There was a struggle over the leadership of the Quebec branch which resulted in a schism in the order. When Luc Jouret arrived to govern the commune, he antagonized members, short-circuited their decision-making processes, and interfered in members’ lives—pushing some toward divorce and others to remarrying inside the OTS. In 1987, the administrative council met, voted Jouret out of office and appointed Robert Fallardeau, a Quebec civil servant, in his place, while allowing Jouret a role in public relations to save face. According to Jacques Larochelle, the OTS’s lawyer, Jouret quit the executive committee in 1993. Roger Giguere, the treasurer, claims that the Quebec branch was non-hierarchical and that its administrative council functioned in a democratic fashion. The European branch of the OTS rejected this decision, and did not recognize Fallardeau, but Jouret fell out of favor with Di Mambro.

An important factor behind the schism was the Quebec nationalist pride and resistance to the perceived forces of Gallic colonization and condescension. One informant observed that the separation/sovereignty issue was being acted out *within* the OTS almost as a self-conscious parallel to Quebec’s negotiations with the federal government.¹⁵

Radical Asceticism

The radical body/spirit dualism that Hans Jonas claims as a “cardinal feature of gnostic thought” (Jonas 1963: 46) was espoused by the OTS. In many ways Di Mambro’s inner circle resembled the Manicheans:

For the initiated Manicheans, the teachers themselves developed a typical sectarian cosmology. Their tightly organized group maintained its identity by elaborate rituals, ruthless rejection of the bad outside, and affirmation by symbolic means of the purity of the group ... their system of moral control and bodily asceticism offered a technique for achieving mastery over the self. (Douglas 1973: 181)

In strong group/weak grid groups Douglas finds ascetic attitudes which reject what is external: the husk, the empty shell, the material world. The OTS brand of asceticism involved, on the one hand, a conspicuous display of wealth and beauty, the connoisseur’s intoxication with art and history, but, on the other hand, members cultivated an inner detachment from the body and from social roles. The newspapers have puzzled over the irrational handling of money in the OTS—the “flipping” or

14 Interview with Templar in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade.

15 Personal communication.

resale of chalets among the leaders and the transfers of large sums from bank to bank. The police have investigated these leads, suspecting “money-laundering”, “arms smuggling” or “mafia connections”—but to no avail. It appears not unlikely that these potlatch-like transactions were public expressions of an ascetic indifference to personal possessions. One close associate of Jouret offered an occult explanation for the mysterious source of wealth in the OTS:

During the Crusades it was the Templars who had the first bank in the world. It was dangerous to travel with money then. People trusted them ... and they always got [their money] back when they got to Jerusalem. They never had financial problems in history—it is still like that. ... The Templars learned to move money, not only across physical spaces, but through time—usually in the form of jewels ... by putting it in secret places, burying it for a century, sometimes through decorporealizing. ... They were always rich, in one way or another.¹⁶

A radical asceticism also governed their social/ sexual experiments. Conventions of age and gender were flaunted so as to cause a kind of *communitas* (Turner, 1968) of disembodied souls. Many couples were formed between partners with unusual age discrepancies: Collette Genoud was 49 and her husband, Gerry, was 39; Huguenin’s wife was in her mid-thirties when she teamed up with Di Mambro’s 14-year-old son, Elio. Huguenin points out a prominent couple who had an unusual marriage; she was 30 years younger than he (Huguenin 1995: 183). Di Mambro was 58 when he began his affair with the 21-year-old Bellaton. She, in her thirties, was involved in a secret affair with Patrick Vuarnet, who was 14 years her junior.

A Quebec Templar expressed the notion that the inner self was sexless:

Women are warriors, too. There is no difference. They fight their own egos. ... They discovered in Russia when they weighed the body, right after the person died they weighed 33 grams *less*. Why? Where did it go? It is the soul. ... And it always weighs the same, if the body is male or female.¹⁷

Marriage was a highly valued state in the Order, but the leaders encouraged “defamilialization” (Kanter 1972). Di Mambro would periodically endow members with new spiritual identities by revealing to them their previous incarnations: Luc Jouret was Bernard de Clairvaux, his wife Maat, daughter of Re; Dominique Bellaton was Queen Hatshepsut, Patrick Vuarnet was Manatanus; Thierry Huguenin was Ram, Melchisedech’s priest, and Falardeau was Akhenaton’s scribe. Then Di Mambro or Jouret would arrange a “cosmic marriage” so that the new couple could embark on an important mission. While sudden revisions in identity were often a prelude to promotion or demotion (Huguenin 1995: 160), these narratives of previous lives seemed to lend drama and the illusion of spiritual progress to members’ lives.

Some members claimed that the group did *not* seek to interfere in their private relationships or family life (Aubert and Keller 1994), but several ex-

16 Personal communication.

17 Interview with a Templar in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade.

members complained they were railroaded into “cosmic weddings.” Much of the experimentation reported in the Quebec commune might be analyzed as classic “commitment mechanisms” which Kanter (1972) finds necessary for the success and survival of communal utopias.

Douglas notes that “small groups” have difficulty in containing conflict, because their system of authority has “very weak resources.” Beyond a certain size, she argues, they cannot persist without introducing a sharper definition into the structure of roles at this low level of organization. Two strategies, she notes, are the expulsion of dissidents and group fission. “Cosmic marriages” seemed to serve the same purpose—members’ identities were altered and their relationships re-ordered so as to form new configurations. In this way, the OTS adapted itself to the “dynamics of renewal and continuity in such social systems” (Douglas 1973: 162).

The “Perfect Vessel”

Lt Richard St Denis noted in the *Sûreté du Québec* press report that the followers of Di Mambro were deeply preoccupied with issues of purity:

They wouldn’t sit on the seat another person had used for fear of contaminating their own energy. Members wouldn’t allow their children to play with non-OTS children for the same reason. ... When OTS children played together they had to wear gloves so that their energy wouldn’t be transmitted and mingled through their toys. (*Gazette*, 19 November 1994: A2.)

The alternative family patterns in the OTS were based on notions of purity. Their goal was to create nine “cosmic children” to usher in the New Age. Only five existed at the time of the “transit,” and the arch-child was 12-year-old Emmanuelle, who died in the fire at Salvan.

Dominique Bellaton was the mother of Emmanuelle, who was believed to have been conceived immaculately. Bellaton had been brought to Di Mambro at the age of 19 by her parents who were worried by her interest in boys and drugs. He told her she was the reincarnation of Queen Hatshepsut, dressed her in elegant silk dresses and make-up, and made her his chief mistress. She enjoyed a charismatic career in her own right; she wrote tracts, performed priestly functions and gave workshops (personal communication; Huguenin 1995: 130). Di Mambro chose her to be the mother of the “avatar,” and claimed that she conceived “without my touching her.” The “rite of conception” was staged in the green room of the subterranean *Sanctuaire*, where the apparition of an ancient “master,” Manatanus, appeared eight feet in height amidst special effects and dramatic lighting. The entity extended his sword to direct a laser beam across the room toward the kneeling Bellaton. As it touched her throat, a flash of light illuminated the sanctuary, and the immaculate conception was believed by the astonished congregation to have taken place. Jocelyne Di Mambro

was disguised as Manatanus, wearing a cape and mask, and Bellaton held a flashlight inside her mouth so that her throat appeared swollen and glowing.¹⁸

During the birth, on 20–21 March 1981, members held an all-night vigil of liturgical chant. Di Mambro had announced even before the conception that the spirit of his mother, Madame Di Mambro, who had died recently, would return in a body of a child born by Bellaton. For three months after the birth, no one was allowed to look at the child. The placenta was buried under a red oak. The baby was baptized with Jordan water and holy oils from Jerusalem blessed in the tomb of King David (Huguenin 1995: 131). Every evening her stools were taken to the garden and planted in the vegetable garden.

Emmanuelle was considered to be “the avatar” who would usher in the New Age and the other “cosmic” children were not allowed within a meter of her. Di Mambro declared that since she was conceived by “theogamic,” she only had one blood in her veins and, hence, was fragile. She wore a helmet and gloves to protect the purity of her aura and a training halter as a toddler, so that she would never fall to the ground. Emmanuelle, affectionately called “Doudou,” lived with the Di Mambros, and their son, Elio; her father would always refer to her as “he.” No one but her family was permitted to touch her. She was instructed in Templar philosophy by Nicky Dutoit, who became Bellaton’s closest friend and confidante, and served as an indirect link to her daughter. One member recalls that “Doudou” spoke five languages and was very intelligent. She grew up believing that she had magical powers, for when she entered the temple, she found she was able to glance at doors and windows and, utter “Ouvrez!,” and they would respond to her will. In fact, Di Mambro had an electronic device under his cloak and would press the appropriate button.¹⁹

In *Natural Symbols*, Douglas (1973) explores the notion that the body is a microcosm of society whose orifices are symbols of the entrances and exits regulating a small community’s intercourse with the larger surrounding society or with competing tribes. In a logical fashion, she shows how purification ceremonies, as well as dietary and sexual taboos, serve to strengthen the boundaries between a minority group and the larger society. She applies this theory to the early Christians’ emphasis on virginity:

The idea that virginity had a special positive value was bound to fall on good soil in a small, persecuted minority group ... these social conditions lend themselves to beliefs which symbolize the body as an imperfect container which will only be perfect if it can be made impermeable. (Douglas, 1966: 158)

The OTS conceived of its own community as shaped like a vessel or container. It was a “hollow earth cult” in the sense that members believed in the existence of Agartha, the theosophical subterranean world, where the Ascended Masters lived in a superior state of civilization. Huguenin (1995) describes the subterranean realm beneath Zurich where the Elder Brothers themselves emanate the necessary light.

18 Peter Pearson’s interview notes.

19 Personal communication.

The OTS built underground sanctuaries which were concealed behind false walls and reached by secret passages, requiring the ritual descent of 22 steps.

The notion of a communion of souls or charismatic community was conveyed by the term *egregore*, which means the “common aura” or “bank of consciousness” of the group. Emmanuelle, like the early Christian virgin-martyrs, became the microcosm or symbol of this small, threatened society. The body of Luc Jouret served a similar function. During full-moon ceremonies members were instructed to avoid looking into his eyes, since he was “the Christ.” Rosemary Klaus tells a startling tale in a Quebec tabloid that eight couples practiced “sperm drinking” in the chapel for purification:

Jouret would reduce our food rations, we lived almost exclusively on peanut butter and bread, because Jouret said we must fast in order to survive the end of time. When a woman complained she was weak with hunger [we were told] the sperm of the “maitre” will restore her lost strength. (*Photo Police*, 14–21 October 1994: 5–7)

Several “leaks” in the “perfect vessel” were caused by the Quebec schism headed by Fallardeau, and by a series of scandals and police investigations. On 23 November 1992 an anonymous phone call warned Quebec government officials of a mysterious Q-37 terrorist group that was plotting to murder Claude Ryan, Quebec’s Minister of the Interior, because he was indulgent toward the claims of the Native Americans. On 8 May 1993, two OTS leaders, Pierre Vinet and Hermann Delorme, were arrested for attempting to purchase illegal handguns. They were initially suspected of being part of the Q-37 plot. At the 30 June 1993 court hearing they received a “suspended acquittal” and a fine.

The theory advanced by the Swiss police is that the Quebec members who died at Cheiry were murdered to avenge the schism led by Fallardeau who supplanted Jouret as the leader in Quebec in the early 1980s, and these murders represented the “just retribution” to “traitors” threatened in the “Testament” (*The Cult Observer* 11(9 and 10), 1994: 21).

“Witch-hunts” and Homicide

In “small group” societies, Douglas notes, “the body of the witch, normal seeming ... is equipped with hidden ... malevolent powers ... often body excretions are the weapon of his craft ... soul sucking, food poisoning” (1973: 138–9).

The OTS had a long history of “witch-hunts,” for betrayal of the order was considered a very serious offense. A local member revealed that he had a serious conflict with Jouret years earlier in Switzerland, and that the very next day a member of his family was hit by a car while cycling through the Alps. The person’s limbs were broken, death was narrowly averted, and the person ended up in hospital with considerable memory loss. When the sad news was reported to Luc Jouret, his comment was “We must reflect upon this event—as a sign!” The informant suspected that Jouret might have arranged the “accident” and, on learning of the slaughter of

the Dutoit family in Morin Heights commented, “There may have been murders before in the group!”²⁰

The treatment of Mme Jouret recalls the negative magic of “soul sucking” found in shamanic religions. Her “outcasting” contributed to the construction of charisma around the person of her husband. One day Di Mambro announced that the “Masters in Zurich” had revealed that Jouret was the reincarnation of Bernard de Clairvaux, the “true founder” of l’Ordre des Templiers in 1128, but that his wife was an obstacle to his new mission, because she was Maat, daughter of Re, and the couples’ “vibrations” were incompatible. A purification ritual was held in the innermost sanctuary at Salvan to “deprive Maat of her energy so as to save St. Bernard.” Huguenin describes how Mme Jouret’s eyes lost their luster, how her cheeks became lined, her walk hesitant, her skin turned green, as she was reduced to “an empty shell, a body without a soul” (Huguenin 1995: 132).

Next, Dutoit’s pregnant wife, Nicky, became a symbol of evil and pollution. The background to this extraordinary situation was explained by Giles Therriault, head of criminal investigations for the Sûreté du Québec:

After Nicki Dutoit had suffered a miscarriage, Di Mambro forbade her to bear children. But after the Dutoits left Switzerland and moved to Quebec they gave birth to a son whose middle name was Emmanuel. Di Mambro then described the Dutoits as “polluted” and their baby as a reincarnation of the “Antichrist”. (*The Gazette*, 19 November 1994: A1–A2)

Di Mambro warned members to avoid the expectant Nicky Dutoit and to bar her from entering the kitchens or dining room (Huguenin 1995: 157). This recalls Douglas’s observation that witches are often accused of poisoning food. The day Christopher Emmanuel was born, Di Mambro announced, “We must observe strict rules, without which we are lost ... You must never look at the baby, and you must on no pretext approach Nickie ... you must disinfect all the rooms” (Huguenin 1995: 159).

The baffling murder of the Dutoits and their baby in Morin Heights certainly suggests elements of the witch-hunt. Dutoit was the lighting engineer who created illusions for the rituals in *l’Ermitage* in Salvan through sophisticated electronic devices, with the help of mirrors, holograms, projections, and lighting effects. He defected in 1991 and moved to Quebec, although he continued to be employed by the OTS. Ex-members have speculated that his brutal murder may have been provoked by his indiscretion in boasting to other members about his work, thereby undermining the charismatic claims of Jouret and Di Mambro, the maestros of these epiphanies; they had encouraged the illusion that these visions of the Grail and spirits were conjured up by the powers of the Grand Masters. These experiences may have been enhanced by drinking coffee laced with stimulants and hallucinogens. A rumor circulated among members that Dutoit was a spy reporting to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). Huguenin describes how Di Mambro decided to “cast down the star” of Dutoit and effect a “symbolic execution,” so that Dutoit “lost his aura” and became a “shadow of his former self” (Huguenin 1995: 156–8).

20 Personal communication.

The Swiss police believe that Di Mambro ordered the killing of the Dutoits because they gave birth to the “Antichrist” and had the temerity to call him “Emmanuel.” These murders were performed in a ritual fashion:

Antonio Dutoit was murdered with 50 knife wounds that could correspond to the number of victims of the OTS. ... Nicki Robinson [Dutoit] received 14 blows of a knife, four in the throat to prevent her having another child in another life ... eight in the back, symbolic of justice ... and two to her breast because she had nursed the Antichrist. The baby was killed by a single stab to the heart, the only way to kill the Antichrist. In his chest the police found a “pieu de bois symbolique”. (*The Gazette*, 19 November 1994: A1–A2)

According to the Swiss magistrate, André Piller, the executioner was Joel Egger and the Genouds were his accomplices. Huguenin states that Di Mambro revealed to Gerry Genoud that he was the reincarnation of the soldier who had pierced Christ with his lance. In order to expiate this terrible crime, he must destroy the “Antichrist” and his parents in a rite of purification. After the “execution” Egger and Bellaton boarded a plane for Switzerland to die in Salvan, but the Genouds remained behind to hide the bodies and to purify their souls by washing the walls of the room. Then they committed suicide.²¹ The nature of Bellaton’s participation in the murder of her closest friend is unclear. Her voice on a cassette recording of an OTS meeting tells of “certain conditions to fulfil, notably that justice and sentences are rendered. There is a ritual to do, perhaps that will be the most difficult” (*Paris Match*, 18 April 1996: 56).

The Dutoits posed a threat to the boundaries of the group, for they moved from the very center and crossed the margins when they defected. As Douglas notes, “magical danger is associated with the idea of boundary, for evil is a foreign danger” (1973: 138).

The Significance of the “Transit”

It has been shown that the OTS belonged to that striking species of primitive or small society described by Douglas as “strong group/weak grid.” It was a “small competitive society” demonstrating the “contraction and ... confusion of social ties which go with the witchcraft syndrome,” and its ruthless treatment of dissidents is characteristic of the “witch-hunts” found in “small group” societies (Douglas, 1973: 137). While the distinctive shape of this new religion does not adequately account for its violence, and this study is in no way intended to be used as a blueprint to detect potentially “dangerous” NRMs, understanding its shape is necessary before one can address the question of what problems the “transit” solved for the OTS and its leaders.

I propose that the “transit” resolved two dilemmas. First, it was a response to the felt threat of pollution. It was a purification ritual that guarded the OTS’s secrets and

21 Personal communication.

preserved its magical power. Secondly, the “transit” was intended as a charismatic display and a radical solution to perceived threats to the leadership and the difficult problem of the succession.

Douglas argues that when the small group is threatened from outside sources, these perceived threats will be acted out in body rituals. Like many NRMs, the OTS suffered from external threats: lawsuits by ex-members, police investigations, and schism. These perceived threats to its integrity were warded off by purity rituals. When core group members defected, their belongings were burned and their rooms sterilized with water at 90°C (Huguenin 1995.) Dissident members, as a kind of “mortification” (Kanter, 1972), participated in ceremonies where they placed garbage bags over their heads as a symbol of environmental contamination (Marsden, 15 October 1994). Many of the bodies of the Quebec “traitors” at Cheiry had their heads encased in plastic garbage bags. The fires that engulfed the Swiss and Quebec chalets were lit for magical purposes: to purify the Templars’ spirits and to transport them to another world. The apocalyptic qualities of fire were explained by Jouret, who believed that the Earth was on the cusp between the transition from Pisces to the Aquarian Age (*L’Actualité*, February 1995: 20–25).

Thus, it might be argued that the “transit” was a drastic measure to preserve the group’s integrity by saving secrets that were *solis sacerdotibus*. It was a way to repair the “leaks” in their “perfect vessel” and transport it to a safer realm. One researcher expressed this theory in lay terms:

The suicide was organized to save their secrets. The whole group was built on everyone having secrets—secrets *within* secrets. Every time the police came to Morin Heights, members trembled lest they stumble upon the crypt in the basement, or desecrate their sacred temples and brotherhood rooms in Geneva. One word to the wrong source, one traitor or indiscretion and all their secrets might be revealed. (personal communication)

The “Testament” expresses pollution fears: “According to a commandment from the Great White Lodge of Sirius, we have closed and chosen to blow up all the sanctuaries of the Secret Lodges to prevent their desecration by ignorant people or impostors.”

The very pattern of the 1994 explosions reveals a strategy for protecting the secret core of the OTS. Initially, the outer ring and most “polluted” layer was “sealed” by fire—after the execution of the “traitors” in Morin Heights. The middle ring of fire at Cheiry included members whose purity/pollution status was mixed or ambiguous—the schismatic Québécois “traitors” and “Immortals” who were “gently assisted” in involuntary “suicide.” Twenty of the 23 bodies had bullet holes in their heads from Joel Egger’s .22-calibre rifle equipped with a silencer, found 168 km away at Salvan. As for the inner ring of 15 “awakened” souls—the leaders and their families—they were among the 25 dead at Salvan, none of whom had bullet wounds,

The “transit” might also be interpreted within the framework of Weber’s (1978) theory of charismatic domination—as a *drastic solution* planned by Di Mambro to prevent the inevitable “loss of charisma” that accompanies old age and infirmity. Di Mambro was afflicted with kidney failure; he became incontinent and had to wear

a diaper. Then he discovered he had diabetes and began to have diabetic fits.²² He also confided in Huguenin (1995) that he had cancer. His empire of relationships was under stress. “Doudou” was entering puberty and chafing at the restrictions entailed in being the “cosmic child,” and expressing an alarming interest in other teens, and their “tasteless” pop culture.²³ Di Mambro’s ex-mistress and protégée, Dominique Bellaton, was angry that he had been using her apartment without permission to throw parties, while she was in Quebec; she was defiantly engaged in an “uncosmic” relationship with Patrick Vuarnet, and was planning to accompany him to his golf tournament in the US.²⁴ In 1990, Di Mambro’s son, Elio, left home and wrote a letter to his father saying, in effect, “You’re a monster!” Elio returned, but he then discovered the closet containing the props used to create the illusions in the *Sanctuaire*: the masks, the sword and the fake Grail, and accused his father of fraud (Huguenin 1995: 240–41).

The “transit” might also be analyzed as a solution to the problem of succession. Di Mambro was not pleased that Jouret had bungled his leadership of the Quebec commune, and the two were known to disagree (Introvigne 1995b: 6). Some versions of the “Testament” were supplemented by a brief note complaining of the “barbaric, incompetent and aberrant behaviour of Dr Luc Jouret” that caused a “veritable carnage,” when the “transit” had been designed to occur in “Honour, Peace and Light.” Does this signal a rivalry between the two leaders? Was Di Mambro, the fastidious opera aficionado, deploring Jouret’s violent means when, failing in his mission to inspire the “Immortals” assembled at Cheiry to nobly opt for self-destruction, he lost his temper and shot them, leaving 22 bodies riddled with bullets as he drove to Salvan? Was Di Mambro, the aesthete, concerned lest this distressing carnage would undermine the dignity and moral high ground of the final act of his Templars?

Joseph Di Mambro was steeped in Egyptian lore and revealed himself to be a reincarnated Pharaoh. Perhaps he chose to stage a Pharaoh’s funeral so that he could close the magic circle, keep his power intact and take his retinue with him into the afterlife. The “transit” was also intended as a “charismatic display,” a tribute to the Elder Brothers and an ecological-apocalyptic message for posterity. As a display, it appears to have dazzled several of the surviving members. One Templar reports:

I knew all these people they found in Switzerland—and each one of them, to my knowledge, was perfectly capable of de-corporealizing at will. But some of [them] were worried they might not make it all the way to Sirius—that they might lose their way and wake up back in their bodies. So, an obvious way to prevent that was to *destroy* the bodies so they would not come back!²⁵

Similar responses were recorded among other members:

22 Peter Pearson’s interview notes.

23 Personal communication.

24 Personal communication.

25 Personal communication.

I was struck by their serenity ... I found them strangely detached. "What is death?", one of them asked with a strange glimmer in his eyes. These people were not crazy ... they readied themselves for the end of the world the way others get ready for an exam. (*The Gazette*, 14 October 1994)

The Swiss police have revealed that an elegant, middle-aged woman wearing expensive jewelery appeared at the police station shortly after the fires. Distraught at being left behind, she wished they had taken her along with them. She even said perhaps they would have had to execute her to help her, because she might not have had the courage to face the "transit" alone.²⁶

Shortly after the winter solstice of 1995, the remains of another Solar Temple "mass suicide" was discovered on a wooded hill near Grenoble, France. Among the 16 who died were Patrick Vuarnet, his mother, two policemen, and three children. The charred bodies were arranged in a star formation, and most had been drugged and shot before the fire consumed them. The investigation is still pending, but theories are polarized. "Conspiracy" theorists suggest that it was a revenge murder which targeted the police infiltrators who "went native."²⁷ "Revitalization" theorists point to a mediumistic leader in her early fifties, who received an invitation to join the "awakened" community on Sirius, contacted surviving members, and orchestrated the second "transit."

While the fact that this puzzling event occurred 14 months after the demise of the original perpetrators may suggest that both mass suicides arose to front deeper subcultural and theological forces than a mere fanatical and unscrupulous leadership, it is also worth considering this "copy cat transit" as an awesome tribute to the posthumous charisma of Grand Masters Di Mambro and Jouret.

Throughout the history of heresy, the morality of the possessors of *gnosis* (*pneumatics*) has been "determined by hostility toward the world and contempt for all mundane ties" (Jonas 1963: 46). This stance has led to two contradictory conclusions: the ascetic and the libertine. Perhaps the Solar Temple's "mass suicide" was a means of reconciling these opposing moral strands. The stance of the ascetic *pneumatic* who feels obliged to avoid further contamination from the world was expressed in the "Testament" of the OTS: "We will not risk pollution by enraged madmen [or] take part in the murder of the earth" ("Transit pour le Futur"). Also voiced were antinomian rationales for killing: "Don't call it suicide", they beseech the reader, they are "board[ing] Osiris' starship"; the murders of "traitors" are explained as a "just retribution"; and those victims forced into "suicide" are really being "gently helped," so that they might "partake in the Christic fire," albeit unconsciously ("Testament"). These passages reflect the libertine mortality of gnostic adepts who not only consider themselves free from the yoke of moral law, but even believe through "intentional violation of [wordly] norms [they] paradoxically contribute to the work of salvation" (Jonas 1963: 46).

26 William Marsden's interview notes.

27 The investigation has since been completed and, to the best of my knowledge, there were no police infiltrators.

Chapter 4

The Mystical Apocalypse of the Solar Temple¹

John R. Hall and Philip Schuyler

At one o'clock in the morning on 5 October 1994, investigating judge André Piller was duty officer in the Judge's Registry in Fribourg, Switzerland, when the telephone rang. "It was the police," Piller told us later. "They said, 'Your intervention is requested at Cheiry for a fire.'" Half an hour after the phone call, Piller arrived in Cheiry, a hamlet about 30 km southwest of Fribourg. On a hill overlooking the village, the barn of La Rochette farm was completely engulfed in flames. While volunteer firemen tried to save the structure, Piller and his colleagues entered the farmhouse. They quickly found that this was no ordinary fire. Canisters of propane and garbage bags full of gasoline sat hooked up to detonation devices that hadn't gone off—yet. Then, Piller reported, "We saw this Monsieur with a plastic bag over his head. Albert Giacobino. We said to ourselves at first that this could be—could be! Conditional!—a suicide with a fire." There were only two problems with this hypothesis: although Giacobino had apparently been killed by a bullet to the brain, there was no gun near the body, and no hole in the plastic bag.

Searching long into the night, police eventually discovered a hidden salon where ten or fifteen briefcases lay open on the floor. In them investigators found papers that mentioned something called the Order of the Solar Temple (l'Ordre du Temple

1 In addition to scholarly and journalistic sources, this chapter draws on interviews with former Temple members, government officials, and other individuals in Switzerland and Quebec, and from documents in the archives of the Centre d'Information sur les Nouvelles Religions (CINR) in Montreal. The authors are grateful for the advice and encouragement of John Bennet. We also thank the many people involved in this project, especially those who agreed to be interviewed. Our thanks also to Annabelle Koch for research assistance; Jean-François Mayer for consultation; Bertrand Ouellet, the director of the CINR; reporters—especially Jean Luque in Switzerland and Eric Clement and André Noel in Montreal—for courtesies extended during the course of research; Susan Palmer and Thomas Robbins for their editorial engagement; and Anne-Marie Tougas for providing archival material on the Solar Temple. The research for this chapter was supported by the UC Davis Faculty Research Council and The New Yorker magazine, and we thank them both.

Periodicals and magazines consulted include: *l'Actualité*, *Agence France Presse*, *Le Devoir*, *The Gazette*, *Le Monde*, *Photo Police*, *La Presse* (Montreal), *L'Hebdo* (Geneva), *L'Illustré*, *Le Journal de Genève*, *Le Journal de Montréal*, *Le Matin*, *24 Heures* (Lausanne, Switzerland), *Le Soleil* (Quebec), and the *Toronto Sun*.

Solaire, or OTS). The room looked as though a meeting had been in progress. “But that raised a question,” Piller noted. “Where are these people?” Finally, around four o’clock that morning, just as Piller and his colleagues were ready to quit for the night, they discovered a secret door in the wall of the salon; behind it was a narrow corridor with more incendiary devices. At the end of the corridor, the men entered a room. There lay 18 bodies, dressed in silk capes and arranged in a circle, radiating outward like the spokes of a broken wheel. Beyond the circle, a door opened into a small, octagonal chamber with mirrors on the walls and three more bodies on the floor. In a small room next door, yet another body lay alone. Altogether, there were 23 dead, 20 of them shot with a single gun, about half of them with plastic bags over their heads.

Piller and his colleagues had barely absorbed the shock of their discovery when they received news from Granges-sur-Salvan, a resort town about 60 km away, where three vacation villas had caught fire. The houses belonged to Camille Pilet, a retired sales director of the Piaget watch company; Joseph Di Mambro, owner of a chain of jewelry stores; and Luc Jouret, a homeopathic doctor and former Grand Master of the Order of the Solar Temple. The police connected the two events when they found a car registered to Joel Egger, a resident of the torched farmhouse in Cheiry, parked outside the Salvan compound. When the flames died down, investigators discovered 25 bodies scattered around two of the three chalets; most of them burned beyond recognition.

Police in Quebec, Canada, heard the news from Switzerland the next morning and they realized that there must be a connection with a strange fire in Morin Heights, a resort town in the Laurentian Mountains near Montreal. There, on the morning of 4 October, only hours before the events in Switzerland, a blaze had engulfed a complex of luxury condominiums owned by the same men—Pilet, Di Mambro, and Jouret—and a woman named Dominique Bellaton. A Swiss couple, Gerry and Colette Genoud, had perished in the fire with no obvious signs of violence. After the news from Switzerland, on 6 October, police returned to the Morin Heights complex and found three more bodies, hidden in a storage closet. Antonio Dutoit, a Swiss citizen, had 50 stab wounds in the back. His British wife, Nicky Robinson Dutoit, had been stabbed eight times in the back, four times in the throat, and once in each breast. Their baby boy, Christopher Emmanuel, just three months old, had been stabbed six times in the chest, resulting in 20 gashes to his heart. According to police reports, Mrs Dutoit and the baby had been “bled white.”

News analysts were quick to compare the deaths in Switzerland and Quebec to the mass suicide and murders at Jonestown, Guyana in 1978 and the fiery carnage at Waco, Texas in 1993. Much the same connection was made by whoever wrote four letters with return addresses of “D. Part” and “Tran Sit Corp.,” postmarked the morning after the fires and mailed to 60 journalists, scholars, and government officials worldwide. One letter, addressed “To Those Who Love Justice,” noted “a particularly troubling coincidence” between the Waco standoff and a 1993 raid by the Sûreté du Québec against Luc Jouret and two associates, Jean-Pierre Vinet and Hermann Delorme. The writers maintained that their group had been subject

to “systematic persecution” by authorities on three continents. Nevertheless they defined their own deaths as a “transit, which is in no way a suicide in the human sense of the term.”

In already tragic company, the Order of the Solar Temple seems truly bizarre. Whereas the People’s Temple and the Branch Davidians included mostly ordinary folk, the Solar Temple, like Aum Shinrikyo, was hardly a sect of the dispossessed. Many of its participants were quite wealthy and socially established, and most others participated in the New Age culture and economy that flourishes in postindustrial cities, resort areas, and other venues of the relatively educated new middle class. Among the dead in the October 1994 “transit” were Robert Ostiguy, a wealthy businessman and mayor of the Québec town of Richelieu; Jocelyne Grand’Maison, a business correspondent for the *Journal de Québec*; Robert Falardeau, an official in the Québec Ministry of Finance; and Guy Berenger, a French nuclear engineer. The roster of known survivors and associates was even more illustrious, and included Alexandre Davidoff, nephew of the cigar manufacturer, and Edith and Patrick Vuarnet, the wife and son of the French skier and sportswear manufacturer, Jean Vuarnet. Michel Tabachnik, a distinguished orchestra conductor and student of Pierre Boulez, had often lectured to the group (although he denies ever being a member). These kinds of people could easily fit in at the Chamber of Commerce or a ski club; they might be expected to embrace rationalism or mysticism, perhaps yoga or Tai Chi, but never Armageddon.

Initially, the Swiss police suspected that the leaders of the group might not be found among the dead. Police were unsure of the whereabouts of several members of the group, including Camille Pilet, the wealthy former Piaget representative, and the prime suspects in the Morin Heights murders—Joel Egger and Dominique Bellaton. The police detained Patrick Vuarnet, who had mailed the transit letters from the Eaux-Vives post office in Geneva on Joseph Di Mambro’s orders. Two days after the fires, André Piller issued warrants for the arrest of Luc Jouret, the charismatic master of the group, and Di Mambro, the presumed financial director. News reports began to portray the two as international racketeers who had amassed an enormous fortune—\$93 million in Australian banks alone—through spiritual confidence tricks, money-laundering, and gun running. In this scenario, the cult became a gang and the deaths became part of a plot to dispose of the Temple’s inner circle and make off with the loot.

But within a week, Swiss authorities announced that the gang suspects—Pilet, Di Mambro, Egger, Bellaton, and Jouret himself—were all indeed dead. A month after the fires, identifications were announced for the last bodies, including Line Lheureux, an anesthesiologist from the Caribbean island of Martinique, and Jean-Pierre Vinet, a former executive at Hydro-Québec, the state-run power company. Swiss police confirmed that 20 of the victims found at Cheiry had died of gunshot wounds. The rest had probably died of smoke inhalation and, perhaps, of a drug overdose or poison. At a lurid press conference the same month, the Sûreté du Québec police force played to the most sensational aspects of the case. Their spokesman interpreted the symbolism of each of the knife blows that had killed the Dutoits and declared

categorically that the infant Dutoit, Christopher Emmanuel, had been killed because he was “the Antichrist.” Joel Egger and Dominique Bellaton had perpetrated the Morin Heights killings and then boarded a flight for Switzerland. From there, Jouret and company had intended to depart for Sirius, the Dog Star.

The October 1994 transit was not the Solar Temple’s last attempt to reach Sirius. Over a year later, on the winter solstice of 1995, 16 more people associated with the sect died in a similar ceremony in a wooded mountain area in France, near the Swiss border. And five more adepts died in a third transit, held near Québec around the spring equinox of 1997.

The significance of the transit will continue to be contested. From one perspective, the people who have died under Temple auspices must be dismissed as either selfish cynics or hapless postmodern fools. For others, the events suggest one or another clandestine plot. From a third direction, the deaths are seen as the product of “cults” enacting some vision of the millennium. But these possibilities are not necessarily contradictory. They all attach to the dynamics of countercultural religious movements and their uneven relationships to an established social order.

Many countercultural religions offer mystical association or quietistic community for individuals who, as Max Weber (1946: 155) aptly put it, “cannot bear the fate of the times.” But in the most volatile apocalyptic sects, charismatic prophecy gives “religious” meaning to an anticipated cataclysmic end of the world as we know it. The Solar Temple developed a quasi-Catholic mystical theology not unlike Aum Shinrikyo’s quasi-Buddhist doctrines about moving from this world to the next, and even though it lacked the strongly apocalyptic Protestant (and in Jones’s case, crude communist) sensibilities of the People’s Temple and the Branch Davidians, it ended in murder and mass suicide that bore a striking resemblance to the violence of Jonestown and Waco. However, as with Aum Shinrikyo, the affluent, mostly post-Catholic society of francophone Europe during the early 1990s hardly seems like the place where apocalyptic anxieties could take hold among people like those associated with the Solar Temple. Would it not be an exaggeration to understand the Solar Temple in terms of a cultural struggle like those that swirled around the People’s Temple, the Branch Davidians, and Aum Shinrikyo? On the face of it, and for multiple reasons, the Order of the Solar Temple does not seem a likely candidate for apocalyptic violence. It is thus important to consider whether the deaths of people associated with the Solar Temple resulted from a dynamic similar to the conflicts at Jonestown, Mount Carmel, and in Japan. If not apocalyptic murder and mass suicide, what was it? And if it was apocalyptic violence, how can its occurrence be squared with the generic narrative model that describes the other three cases? To answer these questions, we need to explore both the historical filiations of the Solar Temple and the actual trajectory of its unraveling.

The Countercultural Movement as a Hybrid Reordering

At their most successful, countercultural movements influence the cultural orderings of society, by producing new meaningful accounts of existence and new forms of social organization. To the degree that, on whatever basis, such cultural innovations yield a competitive advantage to their advocates, they pose a serious threat to the existing social order. The pathways, degree of resistance met, and success of any such reordering as it diffuses through society will vary. Thus, there are vast differences between the hierarchical, bureaucratic diffusion of Catholicism through Europe and the Americas, the sectarian congregational spread of Protestantism, and the early growth of Mormonism as a sort of patriarchic proto-ethnic group. Nor can these developments be understood simply as alternative channels of diffusion: they simultaneously embody the principles of the innovative cultures and forms of social organization themselves.

Wondering whether the Solar Temple was caught up in such a process, on a cold, snowy day in February 1995, we met a surviving member, Louis-Marie Belanger, in a bar in the little Québec town of Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade on the north bank of the St Lawrence River. Louis-Marie Belanger lives on after the deaths of others in the Solar Temple, but he seems to telescope history by transcending time. As Louis-Marie tells it, the Solar Temple of our era met the same fate that befell the original Knights Templar whom they took as their inspiration. “What’s the difference between the Middle Ages and now?” he asks. “None. Maybe the way it’s done is a little more subtle. The result is the same ... We had to close too, because we were publicly banished. Flushed out, you know. We’ve been flushed. Right there.” The Middle Ages? The way it’s done? Banished? “Check in history books,” says Belanger.²

In the twelfth century, when Christian soldiers “took the cross” (hence the word “crusade”) as a promise to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, the Order of Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon was formed to protect Jerusalem and the pilgrimage routes to it. Based at the site of the Temple of Solomon, the knights took religious vows, and they obtained sanctification of their order by the Church of Rome, with the help of St Bernard, the Abbot of Clairvaux, France. Not that Bernard was particularly enamored of the knights’ religious fervor. “You will find very few men in the vast multitude which throngs to the Holy Land,” he observed, “who have not been unbelieving scoundrels, sacrilegious plunderers, homicides, perjurers, adulterers.” Europe, St Bernard suggested, would be better off without such men, most of them badly educated and illiterate, drawn from the lower echelons of the feudal order’s warrior class. As Knights Templar, they could serve the Church in the unseemly duty of killing infidels. But this was a sticky point. Whereas medieval theologians previously had insisted on keeping the carnage of war separated from the direct works of the Church, Bernard produced a fusion: “For Christ! hence Christ is attained ... The soldier of Christ kills safely: he dies the more safely. He serves

2 The following discussion of the original Knights Templar is based largely on the excellent account by Partner (1982).

his own interest in dying, and Christ's interests in killing!" Thus wrote the man who Dante, in *The Divine Comedy* had intercede with the Virgin Mary on behalf of the pilgrim who had finally arrived in heaven seeking God.

During their glory years of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Templars took up wearing the white mantle (symbolizing innocence) with a red cross (affirming their readiness for Christian martyrdom). Under the leadership of a Grand Master, they established cohesive fighting cadres and organized other military ranks of troops under their command. From their early duties maintaining strongholds and protecting pilgrimage routes to Jerusalem, the Templars developed an increasingly widespread organization that helped finance the religious crusades with support from feudal nobility. So many donations flowed in that the Templar order became adept at property speculations and banking functions, such as protecting, transmitting, and loaning funds—services that they began to provide for dukes and kings. Chartered directly by the pope outside any authority of the bishops, the Templars also established lay memberships in the order, in some instances operating a sort of parallel religious organization that collected dues and offered the sacraments, even to men and women who had been excommunicated from the Church. By the end of the thirteenth century, the Order of the Knights Templar had become something of a hybrid corporate conglomerate: operating outside the religious and feudal orders, it combined military and security operations with banking, money-lending, and the dispensing of salvation.

Unfortunately for the Templars, however, their organizational successes overreached their military prowess. The infidels won in the Levant, inflicting a series of defeats on the crusading forces that culminated in the disastrous loss of Acre, on the coast of Galilee, in 1291. Many martyrs attained Christ in that battle, but the defeat raised a thorny theological question. Why had the forces of righteousness under God failed? Because the Templars lacked any solid base in medieval society, and because the order was powerful yet secretive, they became suspect. Perhaps the Templars were not truly servants of Christ but something much more sinister. The money-lending had always offended feudal sensibilities. "Atrocity tales" that began to circulate described the Templars as greedy, corrupt in matters of honor, and foolishly heroic in the crusades. Rumors surfaced that they were sodomites. The king of France, Philip the Fair, dispatched undercover agents to infiltrate the Templars, and in 1307 he ordered an amazing feat for its day—the simultaneous arrest of every known Templar in his kingdom. Two months later, Pope Clement V demanded that other European monarchs undertake similar mass arrests.

Once locked up, Templars found themselves accused of having denied that Christ is the son of God. The tortures to which they were subjected ended only when they confessed to this heresy and disavowed their allegiance to the Knights Templar. Some knights committed suicide rather than repudiate a religious military order governed by a strict rule, but hundreds broke down and admitted to defiling the Cross. Later, when it seemed they might actually get a fair trial, 54 knights recanted their earlier confessions. But before any new trial could be organized, a Church provincial council in Paris sentenced them to death for this "relapse" into heresy. On

12 May 1310, amidst protestations of innocence to the end, the 54 were burned alive at the stake. Four years later the Grand Master himself, Jacques de Molay, denied the charges against the order, and he and a provincial leader of the Templars were also burned at the stake in Paris, on a small island in the Seine. Within the year, Philip the Fair and Clement V were both dead too, victims, legend has it, of the curse placed on them by the Grand Master for their infamy. Dante's pilgrim later found Philip the Fair in purgatory, in the area devoted to avarice.

What then can we make of the possibility that countercultural religious movements engage in hybrid reordering of the social fabric? There is at least a *prima facie* case for understanding the medieval Knights Templar and their fate in light of this thesis. They concocted an innovative hybrid religio-military-financial organization outside the existing order that, if left unchallenged, might have led to an entirely different direction of development of the nascent European power complex toward a sort of religiously sanctioned military capitalistic socialism. By comparison, the Solar Temple of our day has not been nearly so central to the axis on which historical development turns. But Louis-Marie Belanger's seemingly romantic allusion to a distant past should not be lost on us. This man, holding forth over coffee in a bar in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, Québec, wearing a white T-shirt, red V-necked sweater, and black nylon jacket, claims an affinity with the medieval Knights Templar that seems like the commitment of a true chevalier. Louis-Marie shows neither relief nor open regret that he wasn't asked to take part in the transit, and he refuses to judge his fellow Templars. "Maybe they are a little more conscious than I am," he suggests, "and they knew things I didn't know." To the world at large, a group that claims murder and suicide as a "transit" will seem incomprehensible. Yet the sincere and reflective faith of Louis-Marie Belanger gives pause to wonder what that small number of seekers from our era did find in the Solar Temple.

The Salvation Resonance of the Solar Temple

To succeed even modestly, a countercultural religious movement must offer a formula of salvation that resonates with the existential needs, interests, and anxieties of its audiences. This cultural resonance may develop because of a decline in the relevance or availability of previous salvation formulae, and it may be amplified by the emergence of new felt needs for salvation on the part of audiences—sometimes themselves members of newly emergent or changing social strata. This, in broad strokes, is the story that Max Weber told of the Protestant Reformation in modern Europe, where an ethic of self-denial and self-regulation resonated deeply with the spiritual and worldly anxieties of diverse classes participating in the emerging urban capitalism.

No one now suspects that the Solar Temple will bear the same sort of significance for the postmodern world that Protestantism held for modernity. But neither is it very satisfactory to say that the hapless participants in the Solar Temple were victims of an elaborate con game, for charlatanism does not necessarily distinguish flash-in-

the-pan cults from movements that attain world historical significance. As Weber (1978: 242) remarked, the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, “may have been a very sophisticated swindler (although this cannot definitely be established).” The question thus becomes, what kind of con game, with what possible appeal?

To understand the deep resonance of *l’affaire Temple solaire* with age-old cultural tensions of religion, we can go to Catholic Switzerland, to the canton of Valais, below the Great St Bernard Pass, near Granges-sur-Salvan, where the inner core of the Solar Temple took their October 1994 “transit.” The roots of faith in Valais run deep. The town of St Maurice is named after the leader of martyred Roman legionnaires who refused to worship the Roman god Mercury. A church grew up around their tombs, and it amassed a great treasure from the huge numbers of pilgrims who visited the holy site in the Middle Ages. Today, the church suggests much about Catholicism. Its stained-glass windows and sacred reliquaries offer clues about how the medieval Roman Church regarded Judaism as blind to salvation through Christ, and how it incorporated astrological symbols of the planets, the moon, and the sun into its pantheon. But today, its sanctuary is empty except for a handful of Sunday tourists. Only four candles burn at a chapel altar. The Catholic Church has worked hard to rekindle the allegiances of Catholics with increasingly secular orientations, most notably with the Vatican II reforms that dropped Latin from the Catholic mass. But in Europe, this strategy does not seem to have succeeded. And in the process the Church gave up the sense of mystery and tradition that the Latin mass marked, and lost some of its most traditional followers to schismatic sects.

The same bifurcation also occurred on the other side of the Atlantic. Once as Catholic as the pope, Quebec underwent “*la révolution tranquille*” in the early 1960s. “People left the church massively,” remembers Daniel Latouche, a researcher at the Institut National de Recherches Scientifiques in Montreal. The Québécois are still part of a Catholic tradition, argues Bertrand Ouellet, the director of Montreal’s Centre d’Information sur les Nouvelles Religions (CINR). But given the exodus 30 years ago, “they only have memories of the Catholic Church before Vatican II. And when they arrive at the period of life where the great questions come out again, they have nothing, zero, zip for an answer, and they search elsewhere.” Ouellet muses, “Formerly, there was one great religion, like a garden that was fully cultivated. Well, we chopped down the garden, and now things sprout up everywhere. It’s not a spiritual desert, it’s a forest. A jungle.”

Indeed, the CINR has files on as many as 3,000 groups in Québec—Eastern, New Age, fundamentalist, mystical, worshippers of extraterrestrial life, the whole gamut. Most of them are perfectly peaceful. And they are not just found in cities where the New Age bookstores flourish. As Luc Chartrand, a journalist for the news magazine, *l’Actualité* notes, “If you go out of Montreal, in the small towns, you’ll find a surprising amount of everything exotic—acupuncture, Tai Chi, this Japanese massage, Shiatsu.”

The Solar Temple does not draw its cultural inspiration from the East, but from European Catholicism and its countercultures. Not only did its members invoke the medieval Knights Templar, they also became adepts of the longstanding Rosicrucian

heresy that claims, as one seventeenth-century French poster put it, to “rescue our fellow men from the error of death.”

Over the centuries, a series of mystics, prophets, and charlatans have taken up the mantle of the Knights Templar and reported contacts with the “Unknown Superiors” reputed to make revelations to Grand Masters of the Rosy Cross. Both traditions have inspired secret societies dedicated to chivalry, alchemy, and the gnostic wisdom of the ancient Egyptians and Essenes, heralded either as the “true” Christianity or as a far more encompassing spiritual tradition. Eventually, Masonic fraternities began to claim descent from the martyred Templars and the Order of the Rose+Cross as a way of substantiating their ancient heritage. These claims fit easily into the odd Masonic mix of esoteric lore, Enlightenment philosophy, egalitarian conviviality, and “aristocratic” status-graded membership. In the secret Masonic world, the Enlightenment became subject to magical erasure through esoteric wisdom that held out the promise of bridging the Western dualisms between science and religion, reason and faith, spirit and sexuality. Just as surely, secret organizations became venues of political intrigue. By the nineteenth century, conservatives (and, later, fascists) facing unruly rising social classes began to use the lodges to reaffirm the old order, virtue, authority, and the aristocracy of a master race. Yet radicals just as readily drew on the esoteric traditions to invoke reason, community, and a revolutionary theory of “synarchy”—a utopian plan to establish a technocratic oligarchy of Templar initiates.

Over the last two centuries, hundreds of neo-Templar and Rosicrucian orders have formed, dissolved, and re-formed. Religious movement scholar Massimo Introvigne has valiantly attempted to trace the lines of schism and fusion among these groups (1995a). But the task is not a simple one, for the history of concrete events has become mixed with imaginary history. Here, the wall of secrecy surrounding the enchanted inner Masonic world is also a mirror, reflecting anxieties of the everyday outside world. Thus, whenever the Masons surface in the news, fact and rumor and belief are quickly woven into contradictory conspiracy theories. In the popular imagination, clandestine struggles unfold between vast but submerged apparatuses of secret organizations, from the Catholic lay group, Opus Dei, to the Trilateral Commission. This hidden world of intrigue feeds both the semiotic fantasy of Umberto Eco’s 1989 novel, *Foucault’s Pendulum*, and the populist paranoia of Pat Robertson’s *The New World Order* (1991). Whatever their truth, assertions spill back into the wider course of events.

The man who would launch l’Ordre du Temple solaire, Joseph Di Mambro, moved in this murky world for 40 years. At one time or another, he was closely associated with the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), and with the Sovereign and Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem, a neo-Templar society. (Both groups deny that he was ever a member.) Tracing the arrows on Massimo Introvigne’s chart, one can easily imagine Di Mambro rubbing shoulders with members of the Mafia, the Italian Masonic lodge P2, and the private Gaullist police organization, Service d’Action Civique (SAC). On the other hand, there is no proof for any of these connections. There is, in fact, very

little solid information about Di Mambro's life. Born in the south of France in 1924, he is known to have been a jeweler. In 1972 he was convicted of fraud for impersonating a psychologist and passing bad checks. Around the same time, invoking the longstanding mystics' fascination with Egypt, he established a communal group called La Pyramide at a farm near Geneva. When the farmhouse caught fire in 1979 (a possible insurance swindle), he started a group called the Golden Way Foundation in a Geneva mansion. By this time, Di Mambro had become quite friendly with Julien Origas, reputedly a former Gestapo agent in Brest, and the founder of the Renewed Order of the Temple (ORT), a group that combined Templar and Rosicrucian ideas. Di Mambro also came under the influence of Jacques Breyer, a French alchemist.

The main ideas of the Solar Temple trace to the crucible of neo-Templar and Rosicrucian movements in Switzerland and southern France (Introvigne 1995a; Mayer 1996). Julien Origas had participated in the broadly Rosicrucian post-World War II milieu of French mysticism, where claims circulated about the existence of "Ascended Masters" who possess the gift of eternal life, moving in and out of historical existence either in material bodies or as specters. In particular, Origas was in touch with a quite accomplished esoteric practitioner named "Angela," who claimed to be a reincarnated fusion of Socrates and Queen Elizabeth I of England. Through her, Origas began to establish stronger contacts with the Ascended Masters of the Grand Lodge of Agartha.

The other clearly evident source of the Solar Temple worldview was Jacques Breyer. In French Freemasonry circles during the 1950s, Breyer met Maxime de Roquemaure, who claimed to carry the true esoteric legacy of the original Knights Templar through a branch of the medieval order that had survived over the centuries in far-off Ethiopia. Together they founded the Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple, based on apocalyptic ideas about a "solar Christ." Breyer even published a book on the subject—*Arcanes solaire; ou, Les Secrets du Temple solaire* (1959)—followed in 1964 by another on the relation between alchemy and *The Divine Comedy*, Dante's famous poem in which, at the very end, the pilgrim arrived in heaven finally glimpses "the Love that moves the Sun." In the early 1980s, as one former Temple member recalls, Di Mambro, Origas, and Breyer were "three chums who spoke of esoteric things."

The homeopath who became central to the Solar Temple, Luc Jouret, entered the Di Mambro–Origas–Breyer orbit in 1980. Born in the then Belgian Congo in 1947, Jouret had received a medical degree from the Free University of Brussels in 1974, practiced conventional medicine for a couple of years in the Belgian countryside, and then discovered homeopathy in India while on an expedition to learn the medicines of the world. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, he established a homeopathic practice, first in Belgium, then in France, just across the border from Geneva. There, Joseph Di Mambro invited him to speak at the Golden Way.

In turn, Di Mambro arranged for Jouret to meet Julien Origas, and in 1981, Jouret joined the Renewed Order of the Temple. At some point, following the path of Origas, Jouret was ordained as a priest, in his case by a dissident Roman Catholic

“self-proclaimed bishop” (*Agence France Presse*, 4 April 1996). When Origas died in 1983, Jouret took over the ORT as Grand Master. Forced out in a schism within a year, he took more than half the membership with him. By that time, Jouret had tied his fate to Di Mambro. In 1984 they founded the *Ordre internationale chevalresque tradition solaire*, later called *l’Ordre du Temple solaire*, with Jouret again as Grand Master.

The alliance with Di Mambro opened a new world of possibilities to Jouret. In effect, he became the front man who provided channels to a Templar- and Rosicrucian-inspired secret society via an integrated, holistic vision of the New Age. Luc Jouret’s public persona was centered strongly in his homeopathic medical philosophy—an approach that proved attractive to francophone audiences on both sides of the Atlantic. Under the sponsorship of Club Amenta and Club Archedia, organizations that he helped found in the early 1980s (see Chapter 1), Jouret undertook a lecture and conference circuit of hotels and universities in France, Belgium, Switzerland, Martinique, and Québec, making presentations on topics such as “Love and Biology,” “Christ, the Sphinx, and the New Man,” and “Old Age: The Doorway to Eternal Youth.” Jouret’s publications, lecture cassettes, and tickets to his symposia were sold through a network of health-food stores and New Age bookstores, and he became something of a phenomenon. At one 1987 lecture in Lausanne, Swiss religious historian Jean-François Mayer counted more than 600 people in the audience, some from as far away as Belgium and Brittany.

With his deep, soothing voice and dark, penetrating eyes, Jouret was, by all accounts, a riveting speaker. Hermann Delorme, for one, was tremendously impressed when a girlfriend invited him to attend a Jouret lecture in Montreal in 1990:

You start listening, and by God, you know, you just all of a sudden feel so attracted to what he is saying. You talk about the universe, you talk about how man is made of four ingredients and how the stars are made of these same four ingredients. Then you go back to Egypt and Egyptology, and then somewhere along the line comes the possibility of extraterrestrials. And it goes on and it goes on like that. But the more you hear, the less you understand, and therefore, the more you want to know. You slowly get caught up in the web.

Out of the hundreds who came to the public lectures, at least a handful were usually tempted by the web, and Jouret and his associates gave them special attention. Those who were interested in the “art of living” could join one of his clubs, each of which specialized in a different area: nutrition and organic gardening, or music and theater. For those drawn to more spiritual matters, Jouret had something else to offer. After Hermann Delorme attended his second seminar, he was called up on stage, and Jouret told him, “If you make the first steps, I’ll make sure that you make the other ones.” “Well,” Hermann said, “I had no idea what he meant, but it sounded so great, you know, coming from him. I felt like I had been singled out. He had that ability to make you feel important, and it was important to me to feel that way.”

In Jouret’s vision, the practice of homeopathy connects with the unity of all energies: “In the interior of the physical body there blooms a vital force, a vital

energy which was there before Man's physical appearance on earth," he asserted. In turn, every pathology results from a disruption of the vibrations of vital energy, manifested in symptoms. But the homeopathic practitioner is not interested in clinical symptoms. What matters is the Sick Being. As Jouret concluded on one of his cassettes, "You are not sick because you have a disease; you have a disease because you are sick."

Given the unity of all things, it was an easy jump from homeopathy to environmentalism, and from there to ecological apocalypse. Pollution, Jouret said, affects the earth in the same way that a bad diet affects the human body—it disrupts the vital energy. In fact, pollution is not merely "the exterior degradation of the Planet, of Life as such," it is "an exterior reflection of a pollution much deeper inside Man—mental pollution, emotional pollution, and, at the extreme, an authentically spiritual pollution."

Against this grim vision Jouret counterposed the transition from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius. However, the passage would not be as peaceful as the 1960s vision. We face "a kingdom of fire, in which everything will be consumed." For those who survive and cross over, the Age of Aquarius will bring new laws, new ways of thinking, and new vibratory harmonies. In the meantime, Jouret intimated, controlling the vital force will not only assure victory over disease and pollution in this world, it can completely liberate us from the human condition.

Vital force or no, with l'Ordre du Temple solaire hardly begun, Jouret already began to feel restrictions on his freedom in Europe. According to Jean-François Mayer, Jouret was quite upset that his name was mentioned publicly in connection with Origas's Renewed Order of the Temple, a group identified as "very dangerous" in a 1984 publication issued by the Center for Documentation, Education, and Action Against Mental Manipulation, a French anticult organization. That same year Jouret told journalist Mario Pelletier in Montreal that Europe was old and worn out, its land filled with millions and millions of bodies, and too many vibrations of war and violence. Across the Atlantic, Jouret revealed to followers, Québec was blessed with a broad granite plate and a strong magnetic field that would protect the area from earthquakes in the coming cataclysm. By 1984, he and Di Mambro had decided to establish a base in North America.

It was around this time—back in Switzerland—that Rose-Marie and Bruno Klaus met Luc Jouret, when Bruno consulted the doctor on the advice of a friend. Bruno thought he had a bad earache, but Jouret found something far worse, a "cancer" that he proceeded to "cure." After that Jouret liked to remind Bruno, "You should be dead. You owe me your life." Bruno seemed to take this literally, and he became a devoted follower. Sometime later, the Temple astrologer, a former hairdresser named Marie-Louise Rebaudo, saw major changes in Bruno's chart: planetary alignments revealed that he was to move to Québec to help start a 350-acre "ark of survival." "We were leaving Pisces and going toward Aquarius," Rose-Marie recalled. "Europe was going to be burnt up, and we needed to escape to another continent. They said they wanted one hundred people, enough to repopulate the world afterward."

The survival farm was in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, on the north shore of the St Lawrence River, two-thirds of the way from Montreal to Québec City. The group's headquarters was an old orphanage where Jouret's Club Amenta also established a kind of New Age retreat called Le Centre Culturel du Domaine du Sacré-Coeur. Advertising flyers from the late 1980s announce programs on various disciplines in "the science of life," as well as chamber music concerts and "spectacles." In addition to half a dozen members of the group who actually lived in the house, others who had moved to town took their meals there nearly every day. Once a month, on the night of the full moon, members of the Order of the Solar Temple came from all over Québec for a meeting.

Gatherings both in Québec and Europe also marked the transits of the earth around the sun. Jean-François Mayer recalls attending such a bonfire held in the French Savoie countryside near Geneva to mark the 1987 summer solstice. "The only ceremonial part was the fire, and people came from several sides, each with a torch, and put it in. And there were also some instructions: we had always to turn around the fire only clockwise." During the event, Mayer remarked to a Temple representative, "Oh, this is ritual." "Well, no," the man replied, "Real ritual, it's something much more."

Deemed worthy, the Temple seeker gained the opportunity to experience deeper spiritual truths. But the experience came not through meditation, as in Aum Shinrikyo's Buddhism. "Come on!" says Louis-Marie. "You may meditate, you may meditate, but you don't pass your life meditating. You need your bread and butter on the table, dammit." Nor does personal prayer establish the direct communication with the Divine that the Protestant reformers had championed. The central device was the time-tested practice of ritual. Like traditional Catholicism—indeed, like all religions that ritualize the mysteries of the Divine—the Order of the Solar Temple could distribute its core religious experience even to people who were not "musical" in esoteric theology or in the disciplining of the mind in the pursuit of transcendental illumination. What the order offered was a mystical *mood* available to the many, not just the spiritually gifted.

By 1990, the rules of the order described an organization under the absolute authority of a secret inner group called the Synarchy of the Temple. There were three major degrees—Brothers of the Court, Chevaliers of the Alliance, and Brothers of Former Times—each with three internal ranks. On the occasion of one ritual, men and women wearing white mantles with a red cross over the breast file slowly, two by two, into a round room. Each couple bows before a candle standing on a mirrored triangular pedestal in the center of the chamber, and then the pairs split to form two lines along the wall. Suddenly, from beneath their robes, the chevaliers pull forth long épées. Raising the swords in unison, they bring the cruciform hilts to their faces, then stretch their arms outward, pointing the blades toward the light.

The event is a Solar Temple initiation ceremony, recorded on a video seized by the Quebec police. As the soundtrack switches from Wagner's *Lohengrin* to Gregorian chant, two white-mantled Templars lead in a man wearing a business suit. The escorts take a new robe and surplice from an altar and carefully place them

around the initiate's shoulders. He then kneels before a priest, his hands on the altar next to a red rose and a Bible held open by a sword. The priest picks up the sword and dubs the initiate on his right shoulder, his left shoulder, and the top of his head. After the ceremony ends, the members file out of the sanctuary, two by two, into a long corridor. At the end of the corridor, one can barely see a mirrored door slide open. The video closes with a close-up of Luc Jouret giving a priestly benediction (followed by a fullscreen shot of a fireplace, crackling warmly).

Behind the mirrored door lies the inner sanctum, a small round room just large enough for a handful of people to stand. At a ceremony with 40 people, perhaps only three or four would be admitted to the room, leaving the others to wait outside, sometimes for hours. The chosen few saw and heard the Ascended Masters, emanations of eternal life who dispensed gnostic wisdom and practical advice. Police in Québec and Switzerland have mentioned holographic projections in the crypts, and Temple survivor Thierry Huguenin talks of "montages." It is probable that only Tony Dutoit, Di Mambro's longtime technical assistant, knew how all the special effects really worked; and he was murdered at Morin Heights. However they were created, the projections—together with the robes, candles, incense, and music—created a powerful sacred tableau.

Initiates not only encountered the divine, they joined an eternal chain of reincarnations. Di Mambro especially seems to have promoted this idea. "He made me believe that I was a great reincarnation of Bernard de Clairvaux," Thierry Huguenin told us. He continued:

Whether or not one believes in reincarnation, you have to admit that man lives with emotions, and you know that one can have an experience as a child and remember it at eighty. And you can imagine, if you do believe in reincarnation, that there is a memory, a cellular memory, which, across time and space, comes back home to live in man.

Thierry remembers seeing the last Grand Master of the Knights Templar, Jacques de Molay, and almost all the apostles of Christ:

And then, Egypt, well, there we had a lot. Akhnaton, of course, was Di Mambro. Di Mambro was Akhnaton, Moses, Cagliostro, Osiris. He used to say, "You understand, in all my incarnations I always had to fight, because my spiritual development was always so far in advance of the time when I was living."

Inside the Order, according to Huguenin, Luc Jouret had no special status; he simply had a job to do, like everyone else. Jouret was the Grand Master, but Di Mambro was the secret master, unknown to the outside world. "He was one of the last on earth," as far as Louis-Marie Belanger is concerned. "Maybe one of the last conscious persons on Earth. It's that simple."

"So, could you feel his energy?" The only thing I can answer: you're just next to me, I don't need to touch you. And something may happen—that depends on the Big Guy up there. We're channels. So if a channel opens, fine. That energy can go

through. But if you don't have anything to get from me except words and ideas, we won't be channeling, that's all. You take that radio on that FM dial, how can you catch the message on 107 point 5 if you're stuck at 92 point 3?

The Solar Temple is a hybrid that transcends neat modern distinctions between science and religion, reason and faith, spirit and sexuality, technology and popular culture. Jouret played on wide interests in homeopathic medicine to unveil a theology of health and environmental consciousness that would counter the ecological apocalypse. These ideas became wedded to other "New Age" motifs—astrology, numerology, and time travel—that themselves have been persistent elements in both the syncretic symbolic codes of European Catholicism and the "invented traditions" of Knights Templar and Rosicrucian mysticism. The Solar Temple's neo-traditional Catholic countercultural worldview eliminated any sharp distinction between life and death, and it extended the pantheon of eternal figures like the saints into the world of everyday life by the visits of the Ascended Masters. In a world beset by secular influences even within the Church itself, the Solar Temple resurrected enchantment.

In all of this, the Solar Temple appealed almost entirely to people of francophone Catholic background who felt that the Church had become increasingly irrelevant to the felt New Age concerns of postmodern Europe and Québec. However, its principal innovation—erasing the firm boundary between life and death—resonates with similar religious ideas that have a wider following. In Texas, a woman named Annie Kirkwood—who operates as something of an Ascended Master herself, offering advice on how to move back into the spirit world after physical death—reports on her conversations with Mary, the Blessed Virgin (1991). And the leader of the Church Universal and Triumphant in Montana, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, also sometimes talks about the possibilities of moving in and out of this world. Apparently, the image of heaven as the reward for the faithful upon death is no longer compelling for those who believe in reincarnation. The Solar Temple may not be the avatar of a dramatic cultural reordering, but it reflects a broader New Age reconstruction of religious meanings that has gained the attention of a substantial audience.

The Struggle for Cultural Legitimacy

However marginal countercultural religious movements may appear, they must have a certain power and appeal in wider society, for they are treated as though they pose a real threat, and alternately are subjected to ridicule and repression. Like the medieval Knights Templar, such groups are "utopian" in the specific sense that their ascendancy on a wide scale would entail a dramatic reordering of culture, power, and social relations. In the extreme case, an established Church may suffer a loss of legitimacy at the hands of states that side with a countercultural movement, as was the case with the Protestant Reformation. Given this potential, it is hardly surprising that the trajectories of countercultural religious movements are often

shaped by conflicts with an established social order. As we have seen in the cases of the People's Temple, the Branch Davidians, and Aum Shinrikyo, these conflicts sometimes play out as struggles between the group and a loose alliance that develops among cultural opponents (including former participants and distraught relatives of members), mass media stories that frame issues of moral deviance, and modern states that have absorbed the "religious" function of enforcing cultural legitimacy. In all three cases, the conflict resulted in deadly violence. Yet is there really any comparison? Was the Solar Temple actually subjected to "systematic persecution" as the transit letter claimed?

The leaders of the Solar Temple worked assiduously to promote a public image of high cultural legitimacy, meeting in the best hotels, holding seminars at rented halls in universities. Yet the public facade protected a secret world, and it turned out to be a fragile construction. A trickle of defections that began in the 1990s left the Solar Temple potentially subject to embarrassing revelations by its apostates, and cut into the financial vitality of the group (Mayer 1996). The person who ended up causing the group the most trouble, Rose-Marie Klaus, was the exception who proves the rule of the group's appeal to a culturally Catholic audience. "Mysticism," says Rose-Marie Klaus with considerable distaste. "All this tra-la-la and all those robes. It's a thing very far from Protestantism. Luc Jouret depended on the Masters, but they didn't exist. I never believed in that. I am too Protestant for anyone to tell me that there's something else besides God."

Louis-Marie Belanger thinks that Rose-Marie Klaus was "a pain in the neck all the way," but he did like one thing about her—"she was able to say what she believed in, right in your face. She said once, 'I'm gonna put you into trouble.' She said that to Jouret; I was there." Belanger adds, "And she did." Six months after arriving in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, while her husband Bruno, a lapsed Catholic, grew more deeply involved in the order, Rose-Marie had pulled back. Nevertheless, she continued to live with Bruno in a house just down the street from Sacré-Coeur. But then, as Rose-Marie remembers it, Bruno came home one day and announced, "The Masters have decided. I am going to live with another woman." Upset, Rose-Marie called upon Luc Jouret to mediate, but his solution followed a Temple formula of "cosmic" coupling that ignored the boundaries of earthly marriage. In other words, Luc set Rose-Marie up with another man. "But, ouf, it didn't work," she says. "Six weeks. Because I saw later that this man went with other women, the women had other men. It was very mixed up."

In most cases, married couples separated if one partner did not want to follow the other into the temple. Otherwise, both husband and wife participated—either as a couple or in "cosmic" arrangements. But for years Rose-Marie neither followed her husband nor left Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade. "I had a foot inside, but always one outside," she says. After repeatedly trying to get her husband back, however, Rose-Marie says she eventually gave up. Her complaint was financial as well as marital. "I said I won't do it any more. I can't. I'll be ruined." Sometime in 1990, she began talking about her troubles with friends, including a police officer whom she had met through her daughter's school.

One of the friends suggested that Rose-Marie contact Info-Secte, a privately funded organization in Montreal that works, according to its flyer, “to help families of cult members and ex-members of cults.” Info-Secte (or Info-Cult, as they call themselves in English) defines a “cult” as “a highly manipulative group which exploits its members and can cause psychological, financial and physical harm.” Info-Secte has close ties to the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), an organization that operates on a much larger scale in the United States. A similar group, l’Association pour la Defense des Familles et de l’Individu (ADFI) has branches around France, and on the Caribbean island of Martinique, but not in Quebec. “We are the equivalent,” says Yves Casgrain, research director at Info-Secte.

When Rose-Marie Klaus came to their offices around 1991, Info-Secte already knew a little about the Solar Temple from scattered, unsubstantiated complaints. Klaus told Casgrain about her separation from her husband and her troubled efforts to recoup her investment in the farm at Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade. Casgrain recalls Rose-Marie Klaus also telling him “that there were problems.” The farm project was going bankrupt, investors were losing money, and Robert Falardeau, an official at the Québec Ministry of Finance, had replaced Luc Jouret as Grand Master at Sacré-Coeur. Still, she didn’t provide enough detail or corroboration for Info-Secte to go public with accusations. Rose-Marie Klaus was pursuing a lawsuit at the time, says Casgrain, so “she would never unpack her bags for us.” But Casgrain soon learned more from another source. On 10 September 1991, the president of ADFI in Martinique, Lucien Zécler, sent a circular to Info-Secte and other organizations in Quebec requesting information about the Solar Temple. Zécler’s letter cited the 1984 anticult publication connecting Jouret to the Renewed Order of the Temple and Julien Origas, “alias Humbert de Frackembourgde, former head of the Gestapo at Brest.” The leaders of the OTS, Zécler concluded, “sit at the extreme right of God.” He also described the order’s message of planetary catastrophe. “Only ‘elect’ beings who will be able to change forms can ‘regenerate’ humanity and save it,” Zécler reported, and he quoted a 1991 Temple bulletin announcing, “the countdown is locked in.” The immediate threat, from Zécler’s point of view, was that Jouret had been trying to persuade wealthy and influential Martiniquans to sell their possessions and depart the island for Québec, where the Temple was constructing an “arch” to the new world. And indeed, Jouret had convinced several Martiniquans to invest in complex real-estate deals in which he, Di Mambro, and other temple entrepreneurs traded property among themselves, their initiates, and a variety of shell companies.

“We have come to the conviction,” Zécler’s letter ended, “that the only way to save the relatives of our friends and stop the hemorrhage is to unmask this organization in its noxious practices.” This letter did not get many responses from Québec, but one of them proved fruitful. A little over a month after he sent it, on 20 October 1991, Rose-Marie Klaus composed a four-page handwritten letter, and Info-Secte sent a copy to Zécler. Addressing herself “to all [in] this beautiful world who hope to have a better life here in Canada, believing in Luc Jouret, Grand Spiritual Master of the Order of Templars,” Klaus echoed the themes of “the elect” and “the arch” mentioned in Zécler’s letter, sarcastically suggested how “urgent” it was for her

readers to invest in “this ‘monument’ of manipulation, deception and mystification,” and closed by offering to “give you other information, or to meet you.”

“It was Casgrain who said to us that if we got in touch with Mme Klaus, she was ready to give us a lot of information,” Lucien Zécler recalls. Rose-Marie received a typed letter from Zécler dated 17 July 1992. “Dear Madame,” it read, “In October 1991, Info-Cult provided our association against cults with a photocopy of a letter that you were willing to write to denounce the swindle in which you and your family have been victimized by the Temple solaire.” Public opinion in the Antilles and metropolitan France would benefit from learning about the “actual machinations” of Jouret and the order, Zécler wrote, and he asked Klaus for written permission “before undertaking the necessary steps.” Whatever Klaus did in response, in October 1992, she received another letter from Martinique. “A woman wrote to me and she said, ‘Spend Christmas with us, in the heat, and we’ll discuss the affair. And we want to go to the press to say that it must stop, because the police do nothing. It’s necessary to publish.’”

By the end of the year, Klaus had completed her divorce from her husband, receiving a \$150,000 settlement from the OTS. In the court’s reckoning, this amounted to half the money that she and her husband had originally put into the project. But the settlement did nothing to diminish Rose-Marie’s bitterness; if anything, it freed her to amplify her denunciations. She continued to assert that the Solar Temple had taken her money. With ADFI-Martinique paying for the plane ticket, Klaus traveled to the Caribbean island in December of 1992. During a stay of about two weeks, she spoke to the Rotary Club. Stories about her appeared in *Frances Antilles*, the island’s newspaper. “After the visit of Mme Klaus,” says Zécler, “there was a film that we produced, and the Templars calmed down. As for the project of departure to Canada, they put that in the background.” The campaign of ADFI-Martinique to “unmask” also seemed to produce other results. From what Zécler heard, some Martiniquans “went to Canada to demand the money that they had invested in the project. Because they realized finally that Jouret had fooled them.”

To this point, the Solar Temple had managed to keep increased internal dissension and apostasy outside the public eye in Europe (Mayer 1996: 55–61). The developments in Martinique revealed what a determined opponent could do to fuel public controversy. And indeed, the apostate career of Rose-Marie Klaus soon became connected to a different chain of events in Canada, already in motion. At Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, Luc Jouret had been replaced as Grand Master, as Klaus told Info-Secte. The change occurred in 1990 or 1991, when Jouret began to put more urgency into his already apocalyptic message, and people in the group increasingly responded by questioning his common sense. “He was maybe right, okay?” Louis-Marie Belanger told us. “But he didn’t take it, to be pushed aside. ‘Cause he was a man of pride, you know.” Jouret’s solution was to found a new group, called l’Académie de Recherche et Connaissance des Hautes Sciences (ARCHS), a pun on Jouret’s favorite images of an ark of survival and a bridge to the future. In the schism, he took a number of loyalists with him, just as he had done after the ORT schism in 1983. His key ally, Jean-Pierre Vinet, a vice-president at Hydro-Québec,

helped Jouret move into a new field—giving seminars as a “management guru.” In 1991 and 1992, Jouret gave lectures on such topics as “Business and Chaos,” and “The Real Meaning of Work.” By early 1993, as many as 15 officials of Hydro-Québec had become members of ARCHS.

Vinet and Jouret asked their associate Hermann Delorme to become president of ARCHS, but that turned out to be an honorary title with no more meaning than the knightly ranks within the OTS. “One day I managed to get a little private session with Jouret,” Delorme recalls, “and he says, ‘Hermann, you’re where you’re supposed to be, so just do what you’re supposed to do without question.’ And you’d do it.”

In November 1992, Vinet asked Delorme to get him a pistol with a silencer. Vinet explained that he needed protection, but he didn’t know how to shoot, and he wanted to practice without alerting the neighborhood. Taught to obey, Hermann sought to honor this request, first approaching Daniel Tougas, a policeman whose wife had attended several of Jouret’s lectures. Tougas could provide pistols but not silencers, so Hermann turned to his karate instructor, who suggested a student in one of his courses “who had done some time on a drug charge or something.” That man, Bernard Gilot, turned out to be a police informant.

At about the same time, the Sûreté du Québec reported having learned of a man identifying himself as “André Masse” who made calls to various government offices, threatening to assassinate the Minister of Public Security, Claude Ryan, and several parliamentary deputies. The Sûreté du Québec (SQ) has never been able to find any information about “André” or the organization he claimed to represent, Q-37, whose name was supposedly derived from the 37 Québeckers who made up the group. The Sûreté asserts, however, that at the time their investigators saw a possible connection between Q-37’s threats and Hermann Delorme’s interest in buying guns. Following this slim lead, the SQ obtained a warrant to tap Delorme’s phone, then Vinet’s, and then those of other members of the OTS. When the SQ searched a villa in St Sauveur owned by Temple member Camille Pilet, Jouret and Pilet got wind of the investigation while on a trip to Switzerland. They engaged a Montreal attorney, Jean-Claude Hébert, to look after their interests, but Hébert was unable to learn the reason for the search.

News of the investigation never got back from Pilet and Jouret to Vinet and Delorme, who were proceeding with their plans to buy weapons. Gilot, the police informant, kept stringing them along until the police arranged for him to come back to Delorme with a sting.

He showed me pictures of AK-47s and tanks and Isuzus—what you call them?—Uzis. And I was telling myself, what do I have to tell these people to get a simple little handgun with a silencer? And here they are, asking me all sorts of questions. “How big a group are you?” Of course, you know, we’re about thirty. “You serious?” Of course we’re serious, we’re all business people. “Do you have any political ideology?” Hermann chuckled. “I hate politics! But then you can interpret that as I hate politicians, or I’m gonna shoot politicians. They would interpret everything that I said according to what they *thought* was going to happen.”

Hermann Delorme finally settled on a set of three pistols and a vague agreement to “buy a ton” later. He made the pickup on Nun’s Island, in Montreal on the afternoon of 8 March 1993. Forty-five minutes later, as he was pulling off Highway 74 near his home, he was ambushed by a SWAT team and forcibly arrested. Within hours of police nabbing Delorme, they also took Jean-Pierre Vinet into custody and issued a warrant for the arrest of Luc Jouret, who was in Europe at the time.

Three days after the arrests, Rose-Marie Klaus appeared on the front page of the tabloid *Journal de Montréal*, scowling and holding up a white robe with a red cross. “I Lost One Million,” the headline declared. A week later, *Photo Police*, Québec’s equivalent of the *National Star*, turned up the volume. Next to a picture of Rose-Marie in the same pose, the headline promised “What They Haven’t Told You About THE HORROR OF THE ORDRE DU TEMPLE SOLAIRE.” The revelations in these stories—and in interviews with other newspapers, radio, and television stations—turned out to be a repetition, with some inflation, of Rose-Marie’s allegations to Info-Secte in 1991.

The news coverage continued for over a month, and some of it was more balanced. Active members defended the group in several articles, and the citizens of Sainte-Anne said that they had no objections at all to the OTS. For its part, the Sûreté du Québec kept insisting that, while gun laws had been broken, they had found no evidence of terrorism or arms trafficking. Claude Ryan (Minister of Public Security) himself put out an appeal for public “prudence” on the subject of sects. Yet, even while printing such statements, the newspapers continued to characterize the OTS as a doomsday cult bent on stockpiling arms. A number of commentators, including Yves Casgrain of Info-Secte, could not resist making a comparison to events in Waco, where the government siege of the Branch Davidians had just begun.

The arrests also set off an investigation within Hydro-Québec that was also closely watched in the media. The examiner’s report confirmed that Jouret had given lectures at Hydro-Québec facilities, that 15 employees had been members of the OTS or ARCHS, and that other employees had attended meetings. The report concluded that any financial improprieties had been marginal, but Jean-Pierre Vinet lost his job. (A year later, in March 1994, the OTS and Hydro-Québec were linked again when two transmission towers were blown up. The Sûreté du Québec released a letter that claimed responsibility on behalf of the OTS. The writer, however, betrayed an ignorance of both OTS style and the details of the bombings, and the police dismissed the letter as a prank.)

Attorney Jean-Claude Hébert thought he could win an acquittal on the weapons charges; in fact, afterwards, he still doubted the legality of the warrants and phone taps. Jouret, however, didn’t want any publicity. “They were very preoccupied by a question of image,” Hébert said of Jouret and Pilet, whom he visited in Switzerland. “At that period, they had the wind in their sails, and I could understand that the negative publicity put out in Canada might come down in France, in Switzerland, in Martinique, and spoil his whole network of activities.” When the case came to trial in July 1993, the Crown Prosecutor accepted a plea bargain, and Jouret’s hearing lasted just 40 minutes. The judge’s decision repeatedly asserted that the weapons

had been purchased for defensive purposes and that the defendants had already been abundantly penalized by the media. He sentenced Jouret, Vinet, and Delorme each to one year of unsupervised probation and a fine of \$1,000 to be donated to the Red Cross.

Outside the public eye, in key police circles the gun incident became framed as illegal arms trafficking, and it triggered a chain reaction of official investigations. Within two days of the arrests, the Sûreté du Québec publicly announced an inquiry into financial aspects of the OTS. Australian police opened a parallel inquiry later in 1993. An Interpol bulletin went out, alleging that Joseph Di Mambro and a confidante, Odile Dancet, had taken part in two banking transactions in Australia of \$93 million each. French authorities initiated an investigation in 1994, putting a temporary delay on reissuing the passport belonging to Di Mambro's wife, Jocelyne. By March 1994, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were cooperating with Australian Federal Police inquiries concerning possible money-laundering. Swiss authorities also received bulletins from Australia.

The initial "transit" took place in October of 1994, more than a year after the gun incident and the negative press stories centered on the claims of Rose-Marie Klaus. The organizers of the transit never fully understood the extent of the investigations into their activities, but they had their suspicions. Their transit letters clearly assert the belief that the group was the target of a conspiracy, and the beleaguered tone of their writings is unmistakable: "We do not know when they can close the trap on us again ... what days, what weeks?" (Mayer 1996: 100). Joseph Di Mambro did know about the delay in the renewal of Jocelyne's French passport. On 4 October 1994, he gave Patrick Vuarnet his own and Jocelyne's passports, along with a bitter letter of complaint to send to the French interior minister, "Very dear Charlie" Pasqua (who himself has been associated with Interpol and Service d'Action Civique).

The transit letter, "To those who value justice," never mentioned the rumors of money-laundering that circulated on the Interpol network. But it did air suspicions that a "pseudoplot" had been concocted as a pretext for moving against the OTS by connecting the order with a Québec terrorist group, Q-37, that had never been mentioned publicly before the gun arrests.

By 1995, SQ sergeant Robert Poeti would say, "Q-37, as far as we're concerned, never existed. It was a joke, a guy who called. There are people who are deranged, who do this. We are convinced that the one who made the calls had nothing to do with l'Ordre du Temple solaire. Nothing at all." If so, we are left with an irony of history—that a mere coincidence should have drawn together police action, the Temple's most formidable dissident, and cultural opposition to the group in the mass media.

We are not in a position to know fully about either the events surrounding Rose-Marie Klaus's denunciations of the Solar Temple or how the Sûreté du Québec came to unleash a full-scale gun-running investigation of individuals seeking to buy several pistols with silencers. Perhaps the purchase of arms in 1993 really was ordered to protect survivalists from attack during the big Apocalypse, as Vinet somewhat lamely asserted to Jean-Claude Hébert. Perhaps there had been no plan for a violent transit

in Québec, only the original plan to survive the end times on a solid granite plate. Perhaps. But if plans for the end times ever had a more benign interpretation, the situation changed dramatically after the scandals erupted in March 1993. Hermann Delorme never spoke to Jouret again after the gun incident. “But,” he said, “Vinet told me about Luc and a couple of others—desperate. It was downhill all the way from there. His mind changed, he was a tired, tired, tired, disappointed, disillusioned person.”

The Multiple Constructions of Templar Reality

Countercultural religious movements often traffick in reconstructions of cultural meanings that create tensions with more conventional views of reality. These tensions are especially volatile in an apocalyptic movement, which may locate itself either *within* the Apocalypse as a warring sect engaged in a struggle between the forces of good and evil that amounts to the Apocalypse enacted, or beyond it, as a post-apocalyptic other-worldly sect seeks to escape “this” world to establish a tableau of “heaven on earth” beyond the evils of the secular world.

The People’s Temple and the Branch Davidians advanced strongly apocalyptic ideologies that alternated between escape to a heaven-on-earth versus confrontation with their adversaries, with no other mystical element than the mystical imagery of the Bible’s Book of Revelation (especially important to the Davidians, who nevertheless were far from mystics). In the Solar Temple, like Aum Shinrikyo, a more complex set of tensions presents itself—between the two apocalyptic orientations and the collective search for transcendence in a *mystical association* devoted to meditation or other procedures designed to produce enlightenment and ecstasy (Hall 1987). Thus, three alternative constructions of reality came into play at various junctures: a mysticism of eternal transcendence that nevertheless intervenes in this world; an apocalypticism of escape from impending disaster by establishing a colony “beyond” the “old” world, on the granite bedrock of Québec; and an apocalypticism of persecution by forces that could not countenance their countercultural movement. The tensions among these alternative constructions came to a head in the “gun incident” and the campaign against the OTS channeled through the person of Rose-Marie Klaus. These events seriously destabilized the operations of the group, yet, to date, there is no evidence that they derived from any conspiratorial campaign of persecution involving collusion among law enforcement and cultural opponents. Indeed, although investigations of the group were continuing at the time of the initial transit, they amounted to nothing like the direct state assertion of jurisdiction at Jonestown and Mount Carmel. The Solar Temple as a whole never faced any proximate visible threat. However, for the Temple’s principals to sustain the collective honor of their enterprise, they had to *construe* their failure as the consequence of persecution and resolve the crisis in a way that affirmed their mystical powers. The cultural formula to do this was already in their possession, and they may have planned to use it even before the troubles with Rose-Marie Klaus and the gun incident.

The Solar Temple had long held to a secret doctrine of soul travel between earthly existence and eternal transcendence, and even in the absence of persecution, their theology might have been developed toward warranting a “transit,” which would look like mass suicide in earthly terms. The most esoteric of Temple doctrines claimed to bridge the gulfs of separation between this world and other realms, between the historical present and other times, between finite life and infinite immortality. If you worked through the complex charts and alchemical formulations in Jacques Breyer’s 1959 book, *Arcanes solaire; ou, les secrets du Temple Solaire*, you would grasp the relation between eternity and cycles of history; then you could move from one to the other. Many of Breyer’s formulations are based on ancient wisdom concerning triangles (the two-triangled Star of David, Breyer claims, derives from a revealed religion that preceded Jews, Aryans, or Celts). In one diagram, the triangle’s apex is “disincarnation”—beyond material existence; the base of the triangle rests on the line of historical time. Along the triangle’s sides, sages can move from incarnation to disincarnation, carrying the Solar Depository in and out of historical time, *if* they coordinate their actions with rare dates of high energy.

For the Age of Pisces, the phases of the astrological cycle on the base of the triangle are defined by rays representing the colors of the rainbow, which radiate from the apex. With seven colors, each having a temporal projection of 308 years, the Age of Pisces “granted to our Elementary Human Species” lasts 2,156 years. A foldout chart directly aligns Pisces with the Apocalypse of St John the Divine, beginning with the birth of Jesus Christ. The last phase, beginning with the revolutions of 1848, is divided in half, with the first half ending in the year 2002. Leading up to this moment, “After Struggles on all Planes, Union achieved between Sulfur and Mercury. (Grand Monarchy. Temple. Apotheosis. Truth.) ‘Fire!’” Breyer enthuses, “Ask God: that Israel (among others) convert to Christianity, now that we have reached *the End of Time!*” On another chart, the “End of Incarnation” is calculated to the year 1999.8 (all dates are only approximate, Breyer notes, based as they are on mere mundane calculation). On a third chart, he points out that Jesus was born four years before the year 1 ME, and concludes, “The Grand Monarchy ought to Leave this world around 1995–96.”

Already in 1986, the Temple’s astrologer, who wrote under the name of Marilou de Saint-Aignan, grandly described an “evolution toward the state of God” and the opening of “a door to the infinite.” The astrologer foresaw man’s “voyage across the stars.” “Through plutonian influence,” she asserted, “he ought to be able to undergo the disintegration of the physical body so that he may set free the foundation of his soul.” But the seeker had to steel himself: “The absence of fear in facing the events, however painful they may be, is evidence that he is on the right path.” Much the same narrative could be found in *Voyage Intemporel: Terre Ciel Connection*, a photo-comic book published in 1982 available for sale at Luc Jouret’s lectures.³ And these ideas are part of a wider francophone New Age culture awash with ideas of immortality, reincarnation, time travel, and astral voyages.

3 Guery and Macedo (1982). We thank Jean-François Mayer for bringing this publication to our attention.

In the early 1990s, Hermann Delorme reminds us, “There was talk of this ‘departure’ for Sirius.” This indeed was the location of the “Great White Lodge” mentioned in one transit letter. Another of the letters, “Transit for the Future,” alludes to a group of 33 Rosicrucian Elder Brothers who once lived their own terrestrial lives, but who now use “assumed bodies to manifest themselves in this world and to accomplish the Divine Plans” (in New Age language, they are “walk-ins”). Because their message was rejected, the Elder Brothers decided to leave this historical period of Earth. However, before going, they gathered together people enlightened enough to cross the apocalyptic end of our era and initiate the New Age. As the author of a transit letter put it, “We leave this Earth to rediscover, in complete lucidity and freedom, a Dimension of Truth and the Absolute, far from the hypocrisies and oppression of this world, with the end of producing the embryo of our future Generation.”

“October the 4th, 1994,” mused Hermann Delorme. “Add up the numbers, one by one, and see what we come out to. The fourth, okay, and the tenth month. Four plus one is five plus zero is still five, plus one is six, plus nine is fifteen, and nine is twenty-four. Twenty-four plus four is twenty-eight, two and eight is ten, one and zero is ... one. One is a new beginning.” There was, in fact, a new moon that night, coming into phase just as the planet Mars entered the house of Leo, the polar opposite of Aquarius. The significance of this passage may be explained in a cassette tape found on the door of the farmhouse at Cheiry, but Swiss police will only say that it is the voice of a woman talking about astrology. Either way, said Hermann, “I think everything was well calculated in advance.”

There are two widespread and mutually contradictory myths that have served as backdrops for speculations about the Solar Temple’s transit—that the group was rolling in money and that they executed the transit because of a financial crisis. Television miniseries, movies, and pulp books about the Solar Temple doubtless will spin conspiracy theories based upon both. The first myth, stemming from the famous legend of the \$93 million, originated from an Interpol bulletin about banking transactions between Switzerland and Australia, where Jouret, Di Mambro, and Pilet visited frequently from the late 1980s. Commenting on reports of these transactions after the events of October 1994, Pascal Auchlin, a journalist with the Swiss weekly *l’Hebdo*, reminded readers of the legend of the original Templars’ treasure. Pierre Tourangeau of the Canadian Broadcasting Company announced the treasure as fact, and speculated that such huge amounts could only be garnered through drug smuggling or international arms trafficking, and that an operation on that scale could not succeed without the collusion of government officials. (When asked to back up these claims, a Radio Canada spokesman was reported by *Le Devoir* to be “mute as a carp.”) Later, reporters at *La Presse* in Montreal became captivated by Introvigne’s genealogical chart, connected Di Mambro and Giacobino to the infamous Italian Masonic lodge P2 and the Gaullist Service d’Action Civique, and suggested that all 53 deaths might be the result of a massive Mafia hit. After an 18-month investigation, Swiss authorities reported that they never found evidence of money-laundering or anything remotely approaching \$93 million, but with the seemingly limitless capacity of Templar and Rosicrucian chronicles to absorb conspiracy theories, the failure to

find the big money will no doubt be used to draw the Temple into a far-flung network of intrigue that may even include governmental coverups.

The second myth is that the group around Di Mambro and Jouret took their own and others' lives because of imminent financial disaster. According to this scenario, the gun incident precipitated a wider defection of members (which had already begun with the schism in 1991), and the example of Rose-Marie Klaus encouraged not only Martiniquans, but other disaffected members to try to get their money back. Thierry Huguenin claims that he had filed a criminal complaint as well as a civil suit against Di Mambro and his wife, and that others were after them as well. However, they still held a considerable amount of property at the time of their attempt at transhistorical travel, and cash does not seem to have been a problem. Even if the group around Di Mambro were forced to sell off some property at a loss, they could have continued their lavish lifestyle for some time to come. In short, they did not face any financial crisis in the short term.

What they did face was the loss of something that had been an obsession—the honor and good name necessary to sustain their network of enterprises. Even though the Sûreté du Québec investigation yielded only three handguns with silencers, it unleashed ruin for Jouret, Di Mambro, and their inner circle. Under the glaring spotlight of bad publicity in Martinique and Québec, the lucrative career of a charismatic public lecturer itself became a scandal, closing off a major avenue of legitimation, recruitment, and cash flow. The growing bubble of an expansionary movement burst after March 1993, and the change of circumstances seems to have precipitated a crisis of morale. Jean-Claude Hébert remembers going to visit Jouret in Switzerland after the gun raid. “That’s what started to destroy his pedestal. And he experienced it as an enormous anguish,” says Hébert. “Frankly, he was frightened by what had taken place. I *think* that in his mind, it was perhaps the beginning of the end.” The Swiss authorities concur that, though the idea of a transit dates from 1990, psychological preparation did not begin until 1993 (*Le Monde*, 5 April 1996).

The Sûreté du Québec seems to accept the idea that at least the core group of Templars truly calculated a departure for Sirius. Indeed, the SQ has argued that if their investigators had not stumbled on the plan to buy guns, the murders and suicides would have taken place in Quebec in the spring of 1993, with perhaps twice as many participants. Building on the Temple theory that higher consciousness feeds on other consciousness, one SQ informant explained that 100 people would have provided enough fuel for a non-stop transit to Sirius. Because their plans had been frustrated in 1993, the story goes, they could only gather 53, and so needed to make a stopover in another solar system.

The SQ also offers a theological explanation for the murder of the Dutoits in Quebec before the transit in Switzerland. In their account, the family’s fate was sealed in the summer of 1994, when Tony and Nicky Dutoit had the temerity to name their newborn baby Christopher Emmanuel. Di Mambro had not wanted the Dutoits to have a child in the first place, and he regarded the name as a usurpation of his own daughter’s name. Emmanuelle Di Mambro was a “cosmic child” (supposedly conceived when Joseph pointed a magical sword—with a battery-powered light—at

Dominique Bellaton's throat). "She was the Avatar who was going to rebuild the Temple and prevent the Apocalypse," according to Lieutenant Richard St Denis of the SQ. The Sûreté insists that the Dutoit baby was the "Antichrist," Emmanuel versus Emmanuelle, and they report having found a written ritual procedure according to which "the Antichrist had to be killed by two knights with a stake." Investigators maintain that they found the stake along with the baby enclosed in a plastic bag. (Thierry Huguenin disagreed with this analysis. "There was an Antichrist," he claimed, "but it was a boy, and he's still alive." Louis-Marie Belanger was skeptical about the entire ritually saturated account. Concerning the stake, he argued, "Somebody put it there after. Come on.")

We must take the SQ analysis with a grain of salt, for the simple reason that its interaction with the Solar Temple was not simply an investigation after the fact of the murders. At least from the Temple viewpoint, the SQ was part of the plot against them. In one of the transit letters that denounces the "deceitful accusations" leveled against the group in France, Australia, Switzerland, Martinique, and Canada, the writers reserve their most bitter venom for the Sûreté du Québec and the "pseudoplot" of the Q-37 investigation. They claim that systematic persecution on the part of government agencies, in league with the Mafia and Opus Dei, pushed them to leave this earth. "We accuse them of collective assassination," the letter concludes. It is small wonder that Quebec authorities prefer a theological interpretation of the transit.

The rhetoric of persecution in the letters suggests that the firearms arrests in 1993 did not delay the transit, but rather hastened it. Perhaps the group intended to fight its way through the cataclysm, not flee it, and the pistols Delorme purchased really were intended to protect the survivalists from attack. In any event, one of the letters calls the departure of the order "premature." And it was, at least according to Breyer's calculation of the Apocalypse; the clock was ticking, but there was still time before the End of Time. Even at the End, it should be noted that other groups, most famously, the nineteenth-century American Millerites, seeing their long anticipated and precisely dated Apocalypses come and go, have then either recalculated, or lost the critical mass of support for their movement. In the case of the Solar Temple, Breyer's calculations left considerable room for revisionist flexibility, and other theological resources oriented the group toward post-apocalyptic survival on earth.

We are not in a very good position to conduct the experiment with history that would inform us of what would have happened if the followers of the Ascended Masters had not believed themselves to be the target of a conspiracy. As Casaubon, the Templar scholar and narrator, remarks in Umberto Eco's novel, *Foucault's Pendulum*, "Counterfactual conditionals are always true, because the premise is false." What we do know is that after the scandals erupted in March 1993, Jouret and his group found themselves in dramatically altered circumstances. There are also rumors that Di Mambro was in poor health; he had cancer, people say, of a sort that Jouret could not cure. In his last days, Piller suggested, Di Mambro

could have reached the end of his rope. He could be at the end in terms of health. He could be at the end in financial terms. He could be harassed by people who want money. He could be at the end on the level of the sect—there was a loss of members, loss of support, abandonment by his close relatives.

Perhaps, seeing his life near its end, Di Mambro orchestrated the transit as an effort to dispose of his enemies and salvage personal and collective honor in the face of an earthly organizational future that could promise only further decline.

The distribution of the bodies and their manner of death lend considerable support to the outlines of Piller's explanation. The Dutoits were obviously murdered, but probably not because their son was the Antichrist. According to several sources, Tony Dutoit had become disillusioned with the group in the early 1990s, but he continued to work for Di Mambro because he needed the money and because his wife, Nicky Robinson, was also deeply involved, making robes for the chevaliers and serving as governess for Emmanuelle Di Mambro. When Tony Dutoit began openly questioning Di Mambro's motives and procedures, however, his family was exiled to Quebec. There, Dutoit had begun to reveal the backstage secrets of crypt electronics. That betrayal might have been enough to lead to his condemnation as a traitor. Clearly, those who orchestrated their own departure were not above murder if they could rationalize it as "justice."

Collette and Gerry Genoud just as obviously committed suicide. According to the *Sûreté du Québec*, they had assisted Joel Egger and Dominique Bellaton in the murder of the Dutoits on September 30, and then spent the next four days cleaning up the evidence and preparing for departure. Then they set the timers on the incendiary devices, and laid themselves out on their beds, dressed in their robes and medals. Both Genouds were sedated, but still alive when the fires began in the Morin Heights villas, and Gerry, at least, was apparently conscious, and still ready to make the transit.

The bodies of Collette and Gerry Genoud were never reclaimed by their families. They were laid to rest on 12 December 1994, in a communal plot of the Laval Cemetery, in St François. Frances Houle, spokesperson for the coroner's office, explained, "In all such cases, people are buried without a religious service, because no one knows their religious convictions. They are not cremated, in case someone comes someday to reclaim the bodies and bury them somewhere else."

The four children and three teenagers who died in Switzerland—the 12-year-old cosmic child named Emmanuelle Di Mambro, three others at Salvan, plus three at Cheiry—were murdered, in legal terms and in emotional terms as well. The question that remains is whether parents knowingly participated in the events and brought their children along. That happened in seventeenth-century Russia, when the Old Believers locked themselves in churches and set them on fire (Robbins 1986), and it happened again in 1978, in Jonestown, Guyana, when women brought their babies up to receive the cyanide poison.

The death at Salvan of Joseph Di Mambro's 25-year-old son may mark something equally as twisted—murder for the sake of appearances. If, as reports suggest, the

young man had distanced himself from his father, his presence at Salvan brought the family back together in death. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that a number of Jouret's and Di Mambro's associates were not unwilling participants. Most of the 25 people found dead at Salvan were evidently loyalists or longtime members. They included Luc Jouret, his woman friend, Carole Cadorette, and Joseph Di Mambro, his wife, mistresses, secretaries, and their children. Also found there were Joel Egger and Dominique Bellaton, the presumed Morin Heights murderers, Egger's mother, Bernadette Bise, and his wife Annie, as well as Jouret's Canadian ally, Jean-Pierre Vinet, and his companion Pauline Lemonde. Hermann Delorme recalls the last time he saw Vinet. "I'm leaving definitely," Jean-Pierre told him in July 1994. "You probably will never see me again. You don't have anything left to accomplish, but I do." Others made similar foreboding comments before their deaths. Martin Germain gave a will to one of his daughters. "Take it," he told her, "One never knows what might happen." His wife, a surviving daughter recounts, told her that "One day they were going to depart for Venus, and there was no reason to be sad when they disappeared."

Some transits are worse than others, it would seem. Joseph Di Mambro gave Patrick Vuarnet a short fifth letter printed in the same computer font as the other four. "Following the tragic transit at Cheiry," the letter says, "we insist on specifying, in the name of the Rose+Cross, that we deplore and totally disassociate ourselves from the barbarous, incompetent, and aberrant conduct of Doctor Luc Jouret." It continues, "he is the cause of a veritable carnage which could have been a transit performed in Honor, Peace, and Light." Twenty-one of the 23 people at Cheiry died of gunshot wounds after having taken powerful sleeping pills; some had three or more bullets to the head. The two others died of suffocation, although eight other bodies were found with plastic bags over their heads (perhaps intended to accelerate the incineration of their faces). Some died much earlier than others and their bodies were moved after death. Several showed signs of struggle.

It has been widely reported that Albert Giacobino, the principal investor in the Cheiry farm, and his friend Marie-Louise Rebaudo, the group astrologer, were both disenchanted with the Solar Temple, and trying to recover investments. A group of Canadians, including Robert Falardeau, Jocelyne Grand'Maison, and Robert Ostiguy, came to represent the group in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade. (Indeed, Louis-Marie Belanger insists that Falardeau, Grand'Maison, and Leopoldo Cabrera Gil, a Spaniard from the Canary Islands, were the only members among the 53 who still belonged to the official *Ordre du Temple solaire*.) At least some of the Canadians are thought to have gone seeking a reconciliation with Luc Jouret, but Jouret seems to have had other plans. Ostiguy's wife, Françoise, was said to have gone to "ransom" her husband. Jouret's ex-wife, Marie-Christine Pertué, may also have been invited to Cheiry for more personal reasons. (Jouret and she had married in the early 1980s, but they divorced after their only child died in infancy.) Three of these people, Swiss authorities concluded, were murdered for revenge.

Yet many who died at Cheiry clearly had close or enduring ties to the core group. Jocelyne Grand'Maison had been a member of the Renewed Temple before

the Solar Temple was started. Camille Pilet, the organization's chief financier, was there, as was 70-year-old Renée Pfähler, one of the founding members of Golden Way and a vigorous recruiter for the group. Several of the dead had direct family ties to individuals who died at Salvan, or belonged to networks that went back to the founding of the Golden Way in 1979.

Since all the dead at Cheiry were clearly assassinated, the question remains of whether they submitted freely. Notwithstanding the foreshadowing of departure, there are considerable pressures to declare a judgment of wholesale deceit, trickery, and murder. Friends, associates, and relatives understandably find it disconcerting to believe that someone they thought they knew well could have hidden such an enormous compartment of life. They rightly remain incredulous that anyone could ever have wittingly participated in such a far-fetched project as the transit plan to effect a transmigration of living souls. Some small dignity of the dead might be salvaged if it could be shown that they had been murdered. However, precisely because the organization emphasized secrecy, the accounts that people who are now dead gave of going to "sign papers" cannot be fully credited as proof that they were tricked.

Evidently, people died at Cheiry under a variety of circumstances, from murder to suicide, with shadings in between. Even those who went willingly may have been duped: expecting a spectacular transit, only to be surprised by a bullet to the brain. Yet the possibility remains that a number of those shot to death joined in the voyage, as the transit letters state, "in all lucidity and all liberty." During the investigation into the deaths, a beautiful woman in her forties came into Piller's office, dressed in a dark red cape, draped in necklaces and little crosses. She was devastated, she told Piller, that she had not been summoned to the transit. And Piller replied

Transit? Twenty out of twenty-three with bullets in their heads? What kind of a Transit is that? She answered me, "Listen. They all wanted the Transit, but they didn't have the courage to go. I might not have had the courage either, and I would have been happy if someone had helped me. If it was necessary. Why not?"

In Transit

We cannot rule out the possibility that the Ascended Masters continue to walk amongst us. Despite all the information amassed about the Solar Temple since October 1994, secrets and intrigues remain hidden. The shadowy events that contributed to the sense of destabilization within the Solar Temple, the ambiguity of evidence about a secret organization, and the opportunities for conspiracy theorizing all insure a continuing flow of wildly conflicting speculative scenarios. Investigators and journalists, academics and scriptwriters all try to contain the irrational, to force the affair into some matrix that makes sense. By manipulating symbols, we try to capture the spirits, like tourists taking photographs of the natives. At the moment of photographic success, natives lose control over their souls. But when we develop

the Solar Temple film, the negatives are luridly overexposed, or simply blank. In its bizarre and tragic failure, the transit established an almost impenetrable veil of secrecy.

As in the fourteenth century, the visible order has disappeared in flames. But the transit letters insist, “The Rose+Cross has not finished surprising you.” True, some former members are trying to move on. Having failed to settle with Di Mambro over wages he claimed, Thierry Huguenin has tried to recoup his losses by publishing his memoirs and consulting on a television film. In Granby, Québec, Hermann Delorme considered joining Creations, a multilevel marketing scheme with spiritual overtones. But Lucien Zécler, the anticult activist, asserted that the OTS in Martinique would re-form itself quietly, under a new name. And why not? After all, according to the transit letters, “their name or the label of their organization matters little. We will say simply that they appear and disappear at a precise time, always at critical moments of civilization.”

In the Manoir Ste Anne in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade, the jukebox seemed to grow louder as night fell on the icy world outside. Reminded that the letters mailed by Patrick Vuarnet justify the attempted transit because the world wasn’t ready for the truth, Louis-Marie Belanger allowed, “Well, in my opinion, they’re not wrong.” His pause was punctuated by pool balls colliding with one another. “Maybe they are a little more conscious than I am. And they knew things I didn’t know.” Belanger would continue on his spiritual path alone. As he remarked:

The thing is, you don’t need to be in an order, a templar order, to be a templar. Whatever you do, when you’re on the path of spirituality, you’re always facing yourself in the mirror. You’re alone, even if you’re four hundred members around the world. See, it’s your soul, your consciousness, and that’s it. But I think the Big Guy out there is so just in his creation, that if you need a little help when you’re making a step, he’ll make it up to you.

Anyone who still believes in transit need not despair. Because of “a just law of magnetism,” the authors of the letters mailed from Eaux-Vives proclaimed, they will be able to “call back the last Servants capable of hearing this final message.” From their new state of being, they “hold out their arms” toward anyone who turns out to be “worthy” of joining them. The rest of Earth’s peoples, trapped in the mundane world of time, have their Love and wishes of Peace as we face “the terrible ordeals of the Apocalypse.”

How long into the future servants will be called back remains to be seen. After the winter solstice in 1995, near Grenoble, French authorities found a circle of 14 charred, bullet-ridden bodies of people associated with the Solar Temple who had not made the initial transit. Three were children. The others included Patrick Vuarnet and his mother, Edith. Near the 14 lay the bodies of two other Templars—a French immigration inspector and a French police official. Apparently they had shot the others before starting the fire that would consume the whole group after they had shot themselves. Police later found notes in four homes of the dead describing wishes to “see another world.”

Given that the leaders had all supposedly died in October 1994, this “transit” produced a strong public response. Both French and Hydro-Québec officials voiced concerns that the secret order had infiltrated government agencies, and France formed a government watchdog group to “battle against the dangers of cults.” Authorities temporarily removed a child from the home of her mother, a known Temple associate before 1994. In Québec, Yves Casgrain of Info-Secte warned that the sect probably continued to operate underground, and Hermann Delorme predicted that 10–12 people might be caught up in a new suicide at the summer solstice of 1996 (nothing happened). Police in France undertook preventive roundups involving scores of suspected Temple members, apparently fearing another collective suicide on each new moon, equinox, or anniversary of the dates when the 54 medieval Knights Templar and their last Grand Master, Jacques de Molay, were burned alive at the stake at the beginning of the fourteenth century. But even the close watch could not prevent Rose-Marie Klaus’s former husband Bruno, another man, and three women from taking their lives in a burning house in a Québec village during the spring equinox of 1997; police had last had contact with them the previous summer solstice. Three teenaged children of the deceased were given the choice, and decided not to attempt the transit.⁴

For all our own sciences and religions, we do not know what happens to the souls of the deceased. Atheist, agnostic, or believer, our attitudes toward death are matters of faith. Uncertain of the alternative, most of us do our best to prolong life. We may disagree about capital punishment and war, abortion and assisted suicide, but we find murder and suicide among the young and the healthy to be an unconscionable assault on religious and humanistic values alike. If the letters of transit bear faithful witness, however, death for the believing adepts was not the final frontier, but rather a ritualized journey to be undertaken when transcendent purpose called for it, willingly, with noble spirit, without remorse or fear. By choosing the transit, the true believers among those who died affirmed their heresy by enacting a demonstration.

From the seventeenth century onwards, Rosicrucian societies have claimed to reverse the Fall, offering their secret knowledge to transform human existence from its presently mistaken paths, promising immortality as the reward for breaking through the mantles of illusion. This assault on modern religion and science offers a ready explanation to those of us whom Hermann Delorme describes as “disconnected” from life, family, job. The most alienated among us can convince themselves that they have no home in our world because they really are members of an eternal brotherhood. The disbelief in the outer world sustains the boundaries that divide them from us. The transit letters mailed from Eaux-Vives reject an apocalyptic struggle with detractors who would label them as a cult, and they refuse to sully the wisdom of the ages with transitory struggles against some latter-day inquisition. Martyrs,

4 *New York Times*, 24, 25, 28 December 1995; *Le Monde*, 4, 22 March 1996; *Washington Times*, 11 March 1996; *Agence France Presse*, 3 April 1996; *International Herald Tribune*, 24, 25 March 1997.

argued St Bernard de Clairvaux, sacrifice their lives to a higher cause. Immortals do not make such a sacrifice. They have no life to give. They simply return to eternity.

Reflections

Did the transits of the Solar Temple members amount to apocalyptic religious violence similar to what occurred at Jonestown, Mount Carmel, and in Japan? To answer this question, it would be helpful to know what would have happened if the followers of the Ascended Masters had not believed themselves to be the target of a conspiracy. Although, as Umberto Eco's Casaubon argued, there can be no definitive answer to a counterfactual question, certain elements can be disentangled. At Jonestown and Mount Carmel, the violence began with murder of outside opponents, and in Aum Shinrikyo it began with the murder of a member who knew about the cover-up of the death of a devotee. The first transit of Solar Temple faithfuls followed this pattern, beginning with the murder of the handyman who knew the secrets of the technology used in the crypts to create fantastic sensations during "visits" from the Ascended Masters. Absent Rose-Marie Klaus and the gun incident, if the Temple had attempted a transit, this family with knowledge of organizational secrets might still have died.

A central question, then, is whether the Temple would have attempted its initial transit in the absence of the negative publicity from Rose-Marie Klaus and the gun incident. The *Sûreté du Québec* asserted that it prevented an earlier transit by their arrests, whereas the transit letters describe the departure as "premature." This very description acknowledges the plan for transit, independent of external opposition—a plan that can be tied to Jacques Breyer's (1959) calculation that "The Grand Monarchy ought to Leave this world around 1995–96," that is, around the time of the second transit, at the winter solstice of 1995.

If the Solar Temple were to follow some version of Breyer's script, the plan would not be to wait passively for an external sign of the Apocalypse, but to take action to "leave this world" at a specific point in time in order to feed upon the presumed convergence of harmonic energy force fields. It is thus not completely implausible that the initial transit could have taken place even without either the specific elements of apocalyptic conflict that did occur (that is, the gun incident, the efforts of Rose-Marie Klaus brokered by Info-Secte, the resulting media coverage, the trial, and subsequent investigations) or some alternative crisis that might have been precipitated by actions of other apostates in the wings (for example, Europeans, Martiniquans, the Dutoits).

How, then, would a hypothetical non-confrontational transit be understood within the sociology of religion? This question brings us to core issues about the meaningful structures of mass suicide, apocalypticism, and mysticism. By considering it, we can come to a clearer understanding of the parallels and differences between the episodes of violence associated with the People's Temple, the Branch Davidians, Aum Shinrikyo, and the Solar Temple.

On the one hand, a transit seems contradictory to any ideal typical logic of mysticism, since mysticism does not acknowledge either time in its social construction or a strong dualism between this world and some eternal world (Hall 1987). On the other hand, the model of religious violence we have presented characterizes apocalyptic mass suicide as bound up with issues of collective legitimacy in the face of mobilized public opposition. A counterfactual “pure” transit of the Solar Temple in the absence of perceived external threats (as opposed to the first transit that actually occurred) approximates neither this model nor the ideal typical logic of mysticism. Mysticism has other routes to eternity than physical death, and without a manifest social opposition, mass suicide lacks any apocalyptic *raison d’être*.

These theoretical considerations about ideal typical logics suggest that the specific hybrid character of the Solar Temple has to do with how it combined apocalyptic and mystical elements. As we have seen, the theology in Aum Shinrikyo combined mystical and apocalyptic elements by shifting the Buddhist idea of seeking transcendence into an apocalyptic transformation that legitimated violence against the less evolved. The Solar Temple, by contrast, did not offer its rank-and-file participants any practice such as meditation that would yield direct mystical experience. Instead, the production of religious experience in the Solar Temple depended on a spiritual hierarchy in which a mystagogue, acting as priest, served as an intermediary between divinity (the Ascended Masters) and the audience of religious seekers. Believers took the role of clients who received a mystical experience produced through participation in ritual.

But here another puzzle arises, for what can be called “client mysticism” is a staple of New Age spirituality, found in other Templar and more strictly Rosicrucian groups, tarot readings, and ritual practices under other diverse auspices. Yet there is no obvious theological reason to anticipate mass suicide or any other form of collective death among Rosicrucians in contact with Ascended Masters. Thus, even in client mysticism not so dissimilar from the Solar Temple’s, physical death as a *sine qua non* seems odd. Either death is illusory, and transcendence (that is, the transit) doesn’t depend upon it, or, in the realist Zen Buddhist view (which Aum Shinrikyo rejected), death is the end of life that closes off the possibility of transcendence. There are indications that the Solar Temple theology finessed these alternatives by the thesis that the trauma that seemed like death in the transit wasn’t really death at all, only the wrenching shift from quotidian to eternal reality by Ascended Masters whose existence eclipses life and death in any humanly understood terms. Yet any such claim begs the question of why previous Templar and Rosicrucian adepts had not found suicide necessary for union with the eternal. These are deep puzzles, and ones that are not subject to any tidy answer now that the spiritually most evolved of the Solar Templars have orchestrated their own deaths, along with those of certain of their enemies. With the third transit at the spring equinox of 1997, perhaps all their closest followers have now departed.

The difficulty in squaring the transit with either pure mysticism or currently predominant kinds of client mysticism on their own suggests that these cultural structures are not adequate to explain the violence. A much more likely cultural

source is the Western religious dualism that equates life with temporality, death with eternity and (potentially) transcendence. After all, the Solar Temple operated as a neo-traditional quasi-Catholic organization that both mirrored the client mysticism of the Church itself and embraced the saga of the medieval Knights Templar, who reputedly died martyrs because they dared to embrace the true teachings of the gnostic Christ. In these aspects, faced with opposition, the Temple drew from the deep well of the Western tradition that mixes the client mysticism of dispensed salvation with quasi-apocalyptic struggles for the true faith—in the death of Jesus, the martyrdom of early Christians, and the burnings at the stake of the Knights Templar who refused to recant their allegiance to the order (Cohn 1993; Williams 1975; Frend 1967; Riddle 1967; Partner 1982). Specifically, Temple theology, in appropriating the idea of transit from the writings of Jacques Breyer (1959), combined Christian millenarianism with the concept of astrological eras and mystical harmonics of transcendence. In sum, a meaningfully coherent model of mystical mass suicide is difficult to consolidate. When this sociological incoherence is traced in relation to empirical forms of religiosity, its source is to be found in a mysticism colored both by dualism and by connections with Christian apocalyptic martyrdom.

In the Solar Temple, the theology of ecological apocalypse and survival initially did not depend on external opponents for its meaningful coherence within the group. Thus, if the transit letters had not ranted against the “persecution” that the group alleged, the insistence in one letter that the collective death was “in no way a suicide in the human sense of the term” would have been perfectly plausible. Absent the sense of persecution, the deaths would not amount to mass suicide of the sort that we have posited as the potential denouement of conflict between an apocalyptic group and its detractors. Instead, the deaths would be better understood as the product of an idiosyncratic theology made possible by a form of client mysticism that mapped transcendence within a dualistic matrix of life and death. As Mayer has observed, however, Joseph Di Mambro was flexible and syncretic in tapping theological sources and principles as occasion required. From what empirical information is available, it seems that the initial transit in October 1994 was not the product of a purely mystical theology; nor did it stem from mysticism colored only by an ideology of apocalyptic survivalism. Rather, there was a shift from earthly apocalyptic survivalism to passage beyond the earthly apocalypse in the early 1990s, but this theology only became fully elaborated as “departure” in the context of an increased perception of earthly opposition, from February 1993 onward (Mayer 1996: 70–78).

Whether the October 1994 deaths would have been orchestrated absent the opposition and ensuing scandals is a counterfactual experiment that cannot be completed. Moreover, it remains unclear whether the second and third transits would have occurred in the absence of the initial one. The evidence is ambiguous. What does seem plausible as a conclusion about what did happen—especially given the transit letters’ condemnation of the Temple’s opponents, and also the murder of the Dutoits—is that opposition was sufficient to push believing adepts already enamored with mystical transcendence to the initial physical enactment of transit through death under apocalyptically framed circumstances. Although apocalyptic mass suicide is

properly associated with external confrontations, the dialectic between the Solar Temple's theology of mystical consociation with eternity and the play of events on the ground shows that apocalyptic developments of confrontation can be quite powerful, even if the apocalyptic element of theology is initially relatively weak and other-worldly. As for the second and third transits, even though our understanding of them cannot be disentangled from the conditions under which the first transit occurred, at least implicitly, they raise a central question: could there be religious mass suicide in the absence of apocalyptic confrontation?

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Chapter 5

The Dangers of Enlightenment: Apocalyptic Hopes and Anxieties in the Order of the Solar Temple¹

Jean-François Mayer

Following the spectacular deaths of 53 people in October 1994 and the subsequent “transit”² to another world of two other, smaller groups of members in December 1995 and March 1997, the Order of the Solar Temple became instantly famous around the world and is now quoted as an eloquent example of a deviant “cult.” However, like most other groups which have made the headlines in recent years through violent actions or confrontations, the Solar Temple³ had been unknown even

1 This is a slightly revised and updated version of a paper originally presented to a group of academics and law enforcement agents at the conference “Millennialism and Its Risks” (Neve Ilan and Jerusalem, June 1999), organized by the Center for Millennial Studies at Boston University and the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies. Many references quoted relate to internal, unpublished Solar Temple documents and rituals recovered by the Swiss police during their investigations, to which I was granted access.

2 The word “transit” was used euphemistically by the Solar Temple’s leaders to describe the group’s departure from this world; they did not consider it a suicide in the usual sense of the word. The word “transit” is derived from the vocabulary in use in the Rosicrucian Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), to which Joseph Di Mambro had belonged from 1956 to the late 1960s. AMORC uses the word “transition” as an equivalent for death—a word which it considers to be inappropriate, since what happens at that time is “just a transition,” consisting in the division between the soul and the body (the material elements of which will then separate from each other and return to their primary form as living matter). See *Manuel Rosicrucien*, 2nd edn, Villeneuve-Saint-Georges 1961, 191 (the first edition in French was published in 1958; there were several subsequent editions, but I quote from one in use at the time Di Mambro was a member of the order). This was not the only instance of borrowing from AMORC vocabulary in the Order of the Solar Temple.

3 The group used various names throughout its history. The Order of the Solar Temple properly so-called was in fact only a part of the organization, and several members of the core group had never formally become members of that order. However, throughout this article, for the sake of convenience, “Solar Temple” will be used as a label for describing the group as a whole.

to most experts in the field.⁴ When I studied it in Switzerland in 1987,⁵ I certainly did not expect the movement to reach such fame a few years later! To be sure, Luc Jouret (1947–94), who occupied an important position in the group and contributed, as a gifted speaker, to its propagation in French-speaking countries, was not unknown in the circuit of esoteric and New Age lecturers. The first time I listened to one of his lectures in Lausanne, in 1987, there were no less than 700 people attending in a crowded hall; that same year, he gave a series of five one-hour interviews on one of the French-speaking channels of the Swiss National Radio. However, even if a few “cult-watchers” had already mentioned the group in a critical way and some people in the “cultic milieu” privately expressed their dislike of Jouret and other leaders of the Solar Temple, it was certainly not as controversial as a number of other, well-known movements—and, nevertheless, it was this group which met a violent end.

This article deals with two issues: first, it briefly examines some of the apocalyptic beliefs of the Solar Temple; next, it attempts to draw lessons from this case in order possibly to gain some knowledge for our approach to other, potentially violent apocalyptic groups. It does not repeat the whole story of the Solar Temple, which can already be read in other publications.⁶

Catastrophic Millennialism and Survival

The Solar Temple held a dualistic worldview. At regular intervals, new members of the order received monographs for personal study; the first one explained to the new

4 Although in several cases there had been a few isolated scholars, fortunately, who had studied the relevant movements before the events that brought those groups fame: in the case of Heaven’s Gate, Robert Balch had even monitored it from its very beginning and written several articles, the last one published just two years before the suicides (Robert W. Balch, “Waiting for the Ships: Disillusionment and the Revitalization of Faith in Bo and Peep’s UFO Cult”, in James R. Lewis (ed.), *The Gods Have Landed: New Religions from Other Worlds*, Albany 1995, 137–66).

5 See J.-F. Mayer, “Des Templiers pour l’Ère du Verseau: les Clubs Archedia (1984–1991) et l’Ordre Chevaleresque International Tradition Solaire”, *Mouvements religieux* 153 (January 1993), 2–10.

6 See J.-F. Mayer, “‘Our Terrestrial Journey is Coming to an End’: The Last Voyage of the Solar Temple”, *Nova Religio* 2, 2 (1999), 172–96; Mayer, *Der Sonnentempel: Die Tragödie einer Sekte*, Freiburg 1998. See also: Massimo Introvigne, “Ordeal by Fire: The Tragedy of the Solar Temple”, *Religion* 25, 4 (1995), 267–83; Susan J. Palmer, “Purity and Danger in the Solar Temple”, *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11, 3 (1996), 303–18; John R. Hall and Philip Schuyler, “The Mystical Apocalypse of the Solar Temple”, in: Thomas Robbins and Susan Palmer (eds), *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, London 1997, 285–311; Hall and Schuyler, “Apostasy, Apocalypse, and Religious Violence: An Exploratory Comparison of Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians, and the Solar Temple”, in: David G. Bromley (ed.), *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, Westport, CT/London 1998, 141–69.

member that, through joining the order, “in some way, you move from one world into another.”⁷ No doubt one should be careful to avoid overemphasizing the importance of such rhetorical statements: they may be heard in many other religious and esoteric groups. However, it was especially intense among followers of the Solar Temple. A former member whom I had interviewed as early as November 1988 remembered having heard Jouret say at a Christmas 1986 celebration: “Here it is white, outside it is dark.” Such views were associated with the belief that difficult times lay ahead: “The fight has begun between two antagonistic and complementary Forces: White and Black, Light and Darkness, Christ and Antichrist, illusion and reality.”⁸

Jouret’s public talks or interviews never failed to mention that mankind had reached a critical point: environmental problems were seen as a main proof of human foolishness. “It is monstrous to do with our Earth what is done to her ...” he declared on Swiss National Radio in 1987. His lectures repeatedly emphasized that mankind was about to face major problems linked to ecological disaster,⁹ and sometimes he made even more precise predictions: at a seminar which I attended in Geneva in December 1987, he predicted that a major disaster would occur within six years, “maybe by accident.” Pollution had reached the point at which fire was necessary in order to operate a purification and consequently to re-establish a balance.¹⁰ Disasters were seen as a reflection of deeper, more subtle developments: the truth was that mankind was entering a period of major mutations. “Nature gives us obvious signs that there is a transmutation of the world going on. ... We are making a leap in what I call macro-evolution.”¹¹

The Solar Temple very much believed in the imminent arrival of the Age of Aquarius, although this would be associated with major upheavals. Its internal documents sometimes addressed the members as “Templars of the New Age.”¹² The planet had “entered the end of a cycle”¹³ and now found itself at a crossroads. The fundamental idea was one of transmutation: the Earth was giving birth to a new race, the “Solar Race,” the “5th Kingdom,” which would inaugurate a new era, the “Age

7 Tradition Solaire, Plagium No. A1 (from a series of internal, unpublished teaching booklets for use by members of the Solar Temple).

8 Order of the Solar Temple, *Survivre à l’An 2000*, I, Toronto 1986, 78.

9 For more details about the Solar Temple’s views of an ecological Apocalypse, see J.-F. Mayer, “Les Chevaliers de l’Apocalypse: l’Ordre du Temple Solaire et ses adeptes,” in: Françoise Champion and Martine Cohen (eds), *Sectes et Démocratie*, Paris 1999, 205–23 (211–14).

10 *Survivre à l’An 2000*, I, 41.

11 Jouret’s third interview with Swiss National Radio, 1987.

12 “A Templar order is but one approach to providing a framework for like-minded individuals to work together and to live the kind of life which the positive forces of evolution so greatly need. A Templar order is more suited to those who have been born, so to speak, with the Temple ‘in their blood’. Such people are marked by destiny or temperament and are the natural pioneers of the Age of Aquarius” (Gaetan Delaforge, *The Templar Tradition in the Age of Aquarius*, Putney, VT 1987).

13 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

of the Spirit.”¹⁴ “... the Kingdom of Aquarius will be the kingdom of a realized being, of a being who will no more have the features of the being which we are today ...”¹⁵

Such were the hopes cultivated by the Solar Temple in the 1980s. The disasters to come were seen as very serious, very real—so real that the group published and distributed a 150-page handbook detailing in a very concrete and down-to-earth manner how to behave in and survive a nuclear or bacteriological war, how to use first aid in order to relieve the wounded, and so on.¹⁶ Such disasters could no longer be avoided, since mankind had already gone too far,¹⁷ but the members of the order had equipped themselves for survival through the apocalyptic events to come, and would gather in areas supposed to be less affected by the disasters.

Obviously, during the last few years of the Solar Temple’s existence, its leadership lost interest in the idea of secret survival centers¹⁸ and another option moved to the foreground, namely, to leave this world. The hope of surviving the Great Tribulation in safe places on this Earth was replaced by the hope of being away from Earth during these terrible times.¹⁹ While the idea of a departure had previously been understood by most members as leaving one place for another one before imminent disasters, it began to take on a more radical meaning in the mind of Grand Master Joseph Di Mambro and those close to him. The idea of a forthcoming transmutation could be understood in the more classical terms of a gnostic scenario: that is, discarding the physical body in order to reach other spheres. One of the rituals practiced in the sanctuary of the farm in Cheiry, Switzerland—where nearly half of the victims were found in October 1994—was the Ritual of the Resurrection of Osiris. It contained phrases like “Brothers ... let’s go across Space before Fire will let loose its forge,” or “Let Divine Creation abandon terrestrial bodies;”²⁰ life’s ultimate goal was said

14 Ibid., p. 105.

15 Jouret’s fourth interview with Swiss National Radio, 1987.

16 *Survivre à l’An 2000*, II, Toronto 1986.

17 “... we are experiencing greater and greater tragedies on Earth, and I think this will lead us to an irreversible cataclysm ... because mankind refuses its original dimension ... it has not understood the reason of its voyage” (Jouret’s fourth interview with Swiss National Radio, 1987).

18 However, even in 1991, one could find a report about a visit to a possible site for a survival center in Quebec; such centers were supposed to be established as secretly as possible and to be equipped for any emergency, with strong security measures to ensure that not even all the members of the order would know their location.

19 “Will you still be on this Earth when the countdown will begin? Will you still be on this Earth at the time of the Great Tribulation, when Antichrist and the false prophet will reign? Will you still be on this Earth when the world will go through the darkest days of its history? This may surprise you, but it is up to you to decide whether or not you will be present in these endtimes. Keep the hope of leaving this world before the Great Tribulation ...” (“Dernier Voyage”—apparently written in February 1993, this text was the first to refer explicitly to a physical departure from this world).

20 In another ritual, called the “Osirian Alliance,” one finds the phrase: “Divine Creation abandons earthly and impure bodies” (“Ecole des Mystères—Alliance Osirienne”).

to be “beyond Form”.²¹ Passing through materialization was an experience required for spiritual evolution,²² but it was not the end. To describe the Solar Temple as a “millennial group” may be misleading if millennial salvation is seen primarily in earthly terms. More precisely, the idea of a great purification of the Earth as an introduction to the Age of Aquarius and the emergence of the 5th Kingdom was not at all in contradiction with the idea of survival on other planes, or a temporary retreat to them if circumstances proved not to be conducive for the initiates to continue their mission on Earth. Throughout history, they had returned again and again in order to contribute to the evolution of mankind; and at the time of their transit they declared: “... we will continue to work in other places, in other times.”²³ They would wait for “circumstances favourable to a possible Return.”²⁴ Mankind’s refusal to accept what was being offered left the elect with no other option than to leave this world to its own destiny. In other texts, the passage through the “Narrow Door” (that is, the departure of some “conscious beings” from this world) was interpreted as “the Resurrection of the Soul so that the Redemption of the [Human] Race may become a reality.”²⁵ The success of the transit “will guarantee the survival of the universe.”²⁶

Lessons from a Tragedy

It is not for the sake of dramatization that I use a word like “tragedy.” In contrast with a case such as Heaven’s Gate, the “transit” of the Solar Temple did not only consist in suicides of consenting adults. Several people considered as “traitors” were assassinated, some of them in a savage way; children had to follow their parents in death. Therefore the lessons to be learned are more than just an academic exercise.

1) The story of the Solar Temple shows how difficult it is to predict what group may resort to violence and what could happen in such circumstances.

The first real public criticism of the group took place on the French Caribbean island of Martinique, in late December 1992. A Swiss former member of the Solar Temple,

21 “Ecole des Mystères—Resurrection d’Osiris” (several copies of this ritual were discovered in the secret sanctuary of the farm in Cheiry).

22 “Let our experience, our joys and our sorrows ... enrich Creation ... and let our synthesis ... perpetuate Evolution beyond the worlds” (“Ecole des Mystères—Alliance Osirienne”). “From Evolution to Evolution, having gone through mineral, vegetal and animal, in order to reach the human [level] and go beyond it”. Matter becomes more and more spiritual, until it becomes pure enough to go back to its origin, enriched by what it has acquired during its evolution (“Mort et Conscience ou passeport pour l’Amenti”).

23 Testament: “Aux Epris de Justice” (To Lovers of Justice); see Appendix 1.

24 Testament: “Transit pour le Futur” (Transit to the Future); see Appendix 1.

25 “Du Graal à la Troisième Force”.

26 “Testament de la Rose-Croix” (videocassette).

living in Canada at the time,²⁷ went there on the invitation of the local branch of a French cult-watching organization and denounced the order; her accusations were reported by the local media. More serious trouble followed in March 1993, when two members were arrested by the police in Quebec after attempting (upon instructions from Luc Jouret) to illegally buy guns equipped with silencers. The three men were eventually given a light sentence. But the Canadian media had become interested, and using information from police wiretaps, they reported on the strange content of conversations between order members. The movement was described as a “doomsday cult.” However, neither former members nor outsiders seemed able to explain what kind of doomsday was to be expected: Jouret had encouraged a few trusted members to train themselves to shoot, but it was assumed that the members of the Solar Temple intended to use the weapons for self-defense during apocalyptic turmoil.²⁸ At that time, even tabloid newspapers which published sensationalist reports and salacious allegations about the Solar Temple did not suggest that the group intended to commit violence.²⁹ Representatives of cult-watching organizations such as Yves Casgrain of Info-Secte explained that the order was a survivalist group intending to use the weapons for self-defense after cataclysmic events.³⁰ Indeed, he also rightly wondered why the group would need silencers for such purposes, since such devices seemed to indicate an offensive more than a defensive purpose.³¹ Nobody had any answer. From my observations in the 1980s, I likewise evaluated the movement as a survivalist, apocalyptic group. While it is quite possible that, in some cases, a survivalist group will turn violent, it would have seemed a contradiction for survivalist believers to take their own lives as well. But what no outsider knew was that survivalism in the Solar Temple had shifted from the idea of surviving a cataclysm on this planet to the goal of migrating toward other, non-terrestrial planes.

- 2) *When a group becomes involved in violent or criminal activities (or in the preparation of such activities), it may well be that not all its participants are privy to them. Even members or former members are not necessarily aware of what is going on.*

In March 1993, several members of the Order of the Solar Temple tried to explain to the media that they were an innocuous group, devoted mainly to moral improvement and biological gardening,³² and that the group was not a “cult” but held principles

27 She did not hold a high position in the group, but her husband remained a devoted follower of the Solar Temple’s teachings to the end and lost his life in the third transit, in March 1997.

28 *La Presse* (Montreal), 3 April 1993.

29 See *Photo-Police* (Montreal), 26 March 1993.

30 *Le Journal de Montréal*, 10 March 1993.

31 *La Presse*, 11 March 1993, and *Le Journal de Québec*, 11 March 1993.

32 See *La Presse*, 11 March 1993.

rather close to those of Freemasons or Rosicrucians.³³ And, to some extent, they were right: when making such statements, those members who were speaking to the media may not have known that their leaders were already involved in preparing the “transit” toward another world—and, if they did know, they certainly did not imagine that the event would involve violence and murder, but more likely would have seen it as a soft and gentle passage to another dimension (or possibly an evacuation by spaceships).

In the case of the Solar Temple, many rank and file members had little or no direct interaction with the real leaders, above the structure of the order properly speaking; and the people they were in touch with, while aware of problems inside the movement and sometimes even critical of the upper leadership, were hoping to be able to correct them.

Even those with inside knowledge would have had difficulties in believing that the leaders of the Solar Temple might decide to murder several unwilling members or “apostates.” A former member of the order told me that although she had become suspicious of the head of the group (Joseph Di Mambro) before the 1994 events, nevertheless, when an acquaintance came to visit a few months before the “transit” and explained that Di Mambro had apparently developed sinister projects, such a scenario seemed so far-fetched and unbelievable that it could not be taken seriously.

- 3) *Depending upon a variety of internal as well as external developments, the projects of a group may change. Few groups (if any) are predestined from their beginning to end up in violence. We should never forget that young movements, especially smaller ones, can change rapidly, for better or for worse.*

The fact that insiders as well as outsiders were unable to foresee the tragic end of the Solar Temple does not mean that their assessment of the group was wrong. But, in addition to the fact that some elements were known only to a core group, we should remember that movements change,³⁴ and not necessarily only in a positive direction. The Solar Temple was definitely survivalist in the 1980s: the idea of setting up so-called “survival farms” (*fermes de survie*) was very attractive to members, and the main farm established in Quebec was clearly seen as an “ark of refuge,” as I could observe from comments heard from members when I was conducting participant observation in a local group in 1987. Nothing indicated that the order intended to leave this planet: on the contrary, members cultivated the hope of surviving unscathed through the imminent apocalyptic turmoil.

- 4) *The case of the Solar Temple illustrates the fact that not only revolutionary millennial groups sometimes develop dangerous and criminal activities. While*

33 *Le Soleil* (Quebec), 12 March 1993.

34 Cf. Eileen Barker, “Plus ça change ...”, *Social Compass* 42, 2 (1995), 165–80.

members of many millennial groups with an inflammatory rhetoric about a world soon to be turned upside-down remain peaceful and law-abiding citizens, the leaders of the Solar Temple, whom nobody would have suspected of being potential assassins, carefully and over a long period planned the suicide and murder of more than 50 people.

In several publications, especially her book *How the Millennium Comes Violently*,³⁵ American millennial scholar Catherine Wessinger distinguishes three types of millennial groups that may become involved in violence: 1) fragile millennial groups that initiate violence in response to a combination of internal weaknesses and external “cultural opposition,” in order to preserve their ultimate concern; 2) revolutionary millennial groups that seek to overthrow the existing order to establish their millennial kingdom; 3) assaulted millennial groups, which are attacked because they are mistakenly thought to be dangerous. Clearly the Solar Temple fits the first category. It was a group in decline, losing members at an increasing rate, and some of these members were becoming critical; in addition, the movement’s founder was aging, and the dream of creating a large movement had not been fulfilled.³⁶

5) A violent reaction is not necessarily proportionate to the objective degree to which a group is assaulted; rather, it is proportionate to the group’s perception of being assaulted. In the case of a fragile group, even a limited level of opposition can be perceived as unbearable. In addition, the perception of being assaulted, even if it does not always correspond to reality, can be used as a powerful tool by the leadership to convince itself and (even more so) to convince some followers to take recourse to violent action.

Judging from the group’s literature, it would certainly not have put itself in the category of a “fragile group” and would have preferred to be seen as an assaulted one. Texts posted to several media and other addressees (including myself) by a member of the order, on instruction of the leaders, on the day when the events became known, simultaneously try to suggest two (somewhat contradictory) explanations: the order had freely chosen to leave this planet, but was also forced to do so by the opposition with which it had met; “... the superior Experience which they were radiating was

35 Catherine Wessinger, *How the Millennium Comes Violently: From Jonestown to Heaven’s Gate*, New York 2000.

36 I had already mentioned this point in my article published in early 1993: the structures had obviously been planned for a movement much larger than it ever became. The success of Jouret’s lectures had mistakenly led the order’s leaders to believe there was a potential for many more adherents; they obviously misunderstood the dynamics of the “cultic milieu” and the fact that many “seekers” in this milieu prefer permanent seekership and a succession of “spiritual experiences” to formal and lasting affiliation with one group only. Most people who attended Jouret’s lectures were not ready to commit themselves. See J.-F. Mayer, *Les Nouvelles Voies Spirituelles: Enquête sur la religiosité parallèle en Suisse*, Lausanne 1993, 283.

turned down by all the races of the Earth;”³⁷ “All worthy men are being forced to keep silent through vile practices of blackmail, which can go as far as murder if they are not ready to serve the interests of this world;”³⁸ “... we leave this world in which our voices can no longer be heard.”³⁹ The Canadian investigation into the Order of the Solar Temple in 1993 was seen as proof of a conspiracy against the group: one of the four texts sent in October 1994 spoke of heavy pressure, of a “hateful harassment” against several members, of “slanderous violence.”⁴⁰ According to the document, justice, police, media, and the government had left the order no choice but to leave this planet: “We accuse them of collective murder.”⁴¹ Although, consistent with its ideology, the Solar Temple leadership claimed to be fulfilling a plan decided upon long before, the documents reveal an exacerbated sensitivity to inner and outer criticism.⁴² Internal documents from the core group, discovered during the investigation, also disclose a growing paranoia during the last few months, the order being seen as facing a conspiracy of planetary dimensions.

However, the reality was quite different. The level of opposition was in fact not very high, even if the exposure was quite painful for a group eager to cultivate secrecy.⁴³ The media reports remained limited to Canada, although it might sooner or later have had an impact in Europe too.⁴⁴ While there were quite sensationalist reports, the Public Security Minister, Claude Ryan, hastened to say that members of “cults” would not become targets of surveillance: “Don’t ask me to start to establish any organized surveillance of a police nature. ... Religious sects are perfectly legal and principled. They have a right to exist, as have all kinds of associations.”⁴⁵ A few days later, he denied information according to which the order had planned to commit terrorist attacks in Quebec, and invited the public to exert caution before

37 “Transit pour le futur”.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 “Aux Epris de justice”.

41 Ibid.

42 “Delusions of omnipotence and refusal to compromise or hear criticisms may appear as a dogmatic need always to be right and an inability to admit error, to apologize, or to recognize the hurtful effects their behaviors have on others. Such leaders are difficult to work with because they must always get their own way” (Len Oakes, *Prophetic Charisma: The Psychology of Revolutionary Religious Personalities*, Syracuse, NY 1997, p. 13).

43 The Quebec daily *Le Soleil* even accurately revealed, relying upon information provided by former members, that the real head of the Solar Temple was not Jouret but Jo Di Mambro (7 April 1993). The title of the report was: “Le vrai patron, un dictateur” [“The real boss: a dictator”]. This must have felt very unpleasant to a man who had chosen to keep out of the limelight.

44 In early 1994, the quarterly of the main French cult-watching organization, the Association for the Defense of Families and Individuals (ADFI), published a report about the problems experienced by Jouret in Quebec (Bulles 41, 1, 24–6).

45 *The Gazette* (Montreal), 11 March 1993. See also *Le Soleil* and *Le Journal de Québec*, 11 March 1993.

jumping to premature conclusions.⁴⁶ One wonders how the Solar Temple would have reacted if it had encountered the harsher climate of the current “cult wars” in some European countries such as France! When interacting with a group, it is not always easy to assess what the impact of opposition really is or can become.

- 6) *As much and even more than external pressure, internal dissent and apostasy may be felt as major threats by leaders of a group and may lead to violent actions: “fallen members” do not only know what is going on inside the group, but, even if they do not go public,⁴⁷ the sheer fact that they leave and put their experience into question seems to shake the very foundations of the group.*

The problem of determining the factors leading to violence is a difficult one. Due to the context of “cult controversies” and also to the trauma of events like Waco, much emphasis has been put upon the emergence of violent reactions as a response to hostility and external pressure.⁴⁸ While it certainly played a role in the first transit of the Solar Temple, and even more so in the subsequent ones,⁴⁹ it was intriguing to discover, during the investigation, that the first document clearly alluding to a “departure” from Earth had apparently been prepared shortly before the problems encountered by the group in Quebec; several policemen in Quebec are convinced that their intervention unknowingly forced the order to postpone a “transit” which may originally have been planned earlier than October 1994. While there is no conclusive proof that an earlier, specific date had been set, the fact that Jouret had instructed followers to buy guns with silencers, as well as the content of wiretapped conversations in early 1993, indicate that some members of the Solar Temple were already on their way toward violence before the public exposure of the group (if we ignore the events in Martinique in December 1992, which, however, had a quite limited and local impact). Then what is it that triggered the evolution toward violence? It is striking to observe that the idea of there being no other way than

46 *Le Soleil*, 17 March 1993.

47 Except for the member (not a high-ranking one) who publicly denounced the order in Martinique in December 1992 and repeated her criticism in Quebec in March 1993, other former members did not spread their criticisms beyond the circle of members or other former members. One ex-member who was trying to get compensation from the group for years of unpaid labor had, however, threatened to publicize what he knew about the group if he did not get what he was asking for; and, his argument actually seems to have been quite efficient in pressuring Jo Di Mambro.

48 An excellent book partly advocating that thesis (while not excluding other factors) has been written by John R. Hall (with Philip D. Schuyler and Sylvaine Trinh), *Apocalypse Observed: Religious Movements and Violence in North America, Europe, and Japan*, London/New York 2000. A well-researched book about Aum Shinrikyo, by one of the leading experts on that case, strongly emphasizes the role of internal factors (Ian Reader, *Religious Violence in Contemporary Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyo*, Richmond 2000).

49 Convinced members who had been “left behind” felt that the order was entirely misunderstood and vilified by the rest of the world.

leaving the earthly spheres seems to emerge strongly in the months and years after the order met its first serious internal dissent, with the departure of people who had belonged to the communal core.

Several facts tend to confirm this interpretation. First, while the documents sent to the media in October 1994 heavily criticize some outsiders, there seems never to have been any attempt by the group to commit violent action against those who had exposed it in the media:⁵⁰ it reserved its wrath for “traitors” who once belonged to the order. Obviously, in the dualistic worldview of the Solar Temple, people belonging to the profane world could not be considered in the same way as those initiates who once knew the truth, but had then abandoned the movement. Another striking indication that the leaders had been strongly affected by “apostasies” or alleged “treasons” consists in the fact that, in the very last days of his life, at a time when several members had already perished, Di Mambro still wrote drafts of two letters (dated 3 October 1994), denouncing two former members to the Attorney General, accusing them of having blackmailed him. This shows how strongly Di Mambro may have resented this “treason.” In addition, there are clear indications that, during the last weekend of his life, he tried (unsuccessfully) to lure into his chalet the first person who, years earlier, had left the communal core of the group. If the man had accepted the invitation, he would certainly have become one of the victims.

7) Whatever the role of ideological and other factors, the psychology of the leader will play a decisive role in the evolution of a group toward violence.

The fact that Di Mambro felt he had the right to decide about life and death, as well as the fact that he apparently did not realize how incongruous the idea was of denouncing former members to the Attorney General at a time when he himself had already caused several of his followers to lose their lives, also shows that the founder of the movement had lost touch with reality. While the popular perception that members of a “cult” must be “crazy” or at best “bizarre” is an oversimplification, and while it is no less certain that most members of the order were capable of functioning in a perfectly normal way in the “profane” world, a case like Di Mambro’s also shows that mental unbalance may play a role in such violent behavior. In addition, it seems quite likely that a dangerous interaction developed between Di Mambro and Jouret, which contributed to the violent outcome.

8) In some cases, violent and spectacular actions are meant to prove something to the world and to have an impact on the general public. Media recognition

50 However, it cannot be ruled out that, with a slightly different set of circumstances, the order’s leaders might have decided to act against outsiders. A former member I talked to in November 1988—well before the events—reported, with some concern, to have heard Jouret declare at an internal meeting in 1986: “Last time, they got rid of the Templars; next time, we will act in such a way that we get rid of them!” I tend to think that the border between internal and external violence is a thin one.

may be an important element in the eyes of such groups, even if they would not acknowledge it openly and may not even be fully conscious of it.

Such a psychological mindset also explains that what appears to us as a desperate escape may actually be interpreted in quite different terms by the group, or at least by its leaders. The transit was indeed—as Susan Palmer suggested—a “drastic solution” to counter the “loss of charisma,”⁵¹ but it was more than that: it was a supreme statement to the world. Di Mambro and his followers undoubtedly claimed to be above the rest of the world, but several elements in their behavior indicate that they also wanted the world to pay attention and to recognize them for what they considered themselves to be. Otherwise, why would they have cared to prepare mailings to a number of media organizations before their death? Why would they have tried to explain what they did and why? Why would they have wanted to leave behind their own legend? In several reports I have already quoted an amazing (tape-recorded) discussion within the core group, in which Di Mambro boasts that the order would do something “more spectacular” than Waco. Why should it be more spectacular, if not for proving something to the world? Di Mambro looks like a modern replica of Erostrates, who set fire to the Temple of Artemis in Ephesus (fourth century BCE) in order to make his name famous—and, like Erostrates, he succeeded to some extent, by making the headlines.⁵² At last, a stunned world is compelled to listen. Even if the price is his own life and the destruction of his flock, the presence of the prophet finally becomes acknowledged in some way.

While I tend to believe that media coverage (if not one-sided and ridiculing the group) may play a preventive role in defusing potentially tense situations before they reach the stage of confrontation, since it gives a feeling of recognition (“at last people are paying attention to our message!”), it is more difficult to assess the consequences if the media enter the field once the violent scenario has already been launched.

Conclusion⁵³

If ten years ago I had been asked which of the religious groups I had met might commit suicides or homicides, the Solar Temple would certainly not have sprung to mind. Even with the same ideology and in the same circumstances, people other than

51 S. Palmer, “Purity and Danger”, p. 315.

52 One is reminded here of remarks made by Mark Juergensmeyer about the theatrical nature of religious terrorism: he speaks of “performance violence” and comments that such acts are intended to make “a symbolic statement” (*Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley 2000, p. 126).

53 This conclusion was originally written with an audience of law enforcement agents in mind, and primarily attempts to address their needs and questions.

Joseph Di Mambro and Luc Jouret might not have lapsed into violence.⁵⁴ Ideological factors are certainly not to be neglected, since people will not take their own lives as well as the lives of others without having some well-developed doctrinal arguments for justifying such action.⁵⁵ However, except in those cases where religious messages clearly call for murder or subversive activities, it remains difficult to deduce from teachings the probability of violence. One of the few serious indications is a previous use of violence or an inclination toward means allowing violence. After a case like the Solar Temple, if a leader were to incite his followers to take shooting lessons, or tried to acquire guns, I would definitely feel concerned.

As we have seen, we can draw lessons from past events, and they may allow us to better understand the dynamics leading to a violent outcome.⁵⁶ But we should also be careful not to become over-zealous in the identification of potentially dangerous groups. Driven by the legitimate desire to prevent a repetition of such tragedies, we might end up seeing such groups at every street corner and misinterpret purely rhetorical statements—and an overabundance of “suspects” would finally render any preventive action an impossible task! Before 1994, I had never received any request asking me if there was a danger of collective suicide in some group; nowadays such questions are not unusual. This should also make us aware of another risk in our analytical work: we should not be overimpressed by the way events have unfolded in the past. While future actions may be inspired to some extent by widely reported ones that have taken place before, we should keep in mind that they may equally well follow entirely different patterns. Before October 1994, the story of the Solar Temple would have sounded like a bad novel. Unfortunately, some spiritual leaders can obviously become quite imaginative when devising such plans; accordingly, if we want our scenarios and analyses to be of some use, they should not only avoid becoming paranoid, but should also remain sufficiently flexible and open to deal adequately with unexpected or surprising developments.

54 While clearly not in the leading position, Jouret nevertheless played an important role in the “assisted suicides” due to his medical knowledge; during the investigation, a notice written by him was found, with indications about narcotic substances to be used. In addition, he showed some fascination with violence.

55 The power of an ideology over the minds of followers can certainly be remarkable: if more members of the Solar Temple took their lives in December 1995 and in March 1997, long after the founder was gone, it is certainly not because they were compelled to do so, but because the message made sense and remained convincing in their eyes.

56 During a research trip to Uganda in August 2000 to investigate the case of the Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (several hundred victims in March 2000), I was amazed to see how some facts would make sense analogically for somebody familiar with other cases of religious violence.

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Chapter 6

Crises of Charismatic Authority and Millenarian Violence: The Case of the Order of the Solar Temple

John Walliss

Introduction

In the early hours of 5 October 1994, police were called to investigate a fire in a farmhouse on the outskirts of the small village of Cheiry, Switzerland, inside which firefighters had discovered the body of a man lying on a bed. The man, Albert Giacobino, had apparently been shot and then had a plastic bag placed over his head. Searching outside, the police discovered a removable wall in a garage that led to a room which had been converted into a makeshift temple. This, they found, contained a further 18 bodies, dressed in ceremonial robes and arranged in a circle like spokes on a wheel, heads facing outwards. Like Giacobino, most had plastic bags over their heads and most had been shot. Close by, in a mirrored, octagonal chamber and in a small room they discovered a further four bodies. Everywhere they looked, the police found canisters of propane gas and bags of petrol linked up to detonation devices which, for technical reasons, had not gone off.

While the police were making their grim discovery at Cheiry, similar fires erupted 60 km away at Les Granges-sur-Salvan in three holiday chalets belonging to Camille Pilet, a retired sales director of the Piaget watch company, and Luc Jouret and Joseph Di Mambro, both of whom were leaders of an occult group, l'Ordre du Temple Solaire (The Order of the Solar Temple, or OTS). Inside two of the chalets police found 25 charred bodies along with the remains of explosive devices similar to those found at Cheiry and a pistol which, it was later determined, had been used to kill the 23 Cheiry victims. Outside, a further link between the two events was discovered: a car registered to Joel Egger, a resident of the Cheiry farmhouse.

These incidents were quickly linked with another fire that had occurred approximately 6,000 miles away in Quebec, Canada. Here, on the morning of 4 October, only hours before the Swiss deaths, fires had engulfed a condominium complex owned by Pilet, Jouret, Di Mambro, and a woman called Dominique Bellaton. During their subsequent examinations, the police found the bodies of a Swiss couple, Gerry and Colette Genoud, along with those of Antonio and Nicky

Robinson Dutoit and their three-month-old son, Christopher Emmanuel. Autopsies determined that although the Genouds had perished in the fire, the Dutoits had met a more violent end: Antonio Dutoit had been stabbed 50 times in the back; his wife eight times in the back, four times in the throat and once in each breast; while their son had, according to police reports, been “bled white” as a result of having being stabbed in the chest six times. These latter deaths, the police also determined, had taken place several days before the fire (Hall et al. 2000).

The deaths, however, were not to end there. Over a year later, on the winter solstice, the bodies of a further 16 Solar Temple members, including three children, were found dead in a wooded area near Grenoble, France. As was the case at Cheiry, the victims were arranged in a star formation and, autopsies revealed that all had been drugged and shot before their bodies were burned. Moreover, some of the deceased had left notes behind about going “to see another world” (Mayer 1998; Wessinger 2000a). Finally (or, at least one assumes so), in March 1997, five more bodies were discovered in a house in Saint Casimir, Quebec. One of the deceased had been suffocated with a plastic bag while the others had died in the fire that engulfed the property (Introvigne 2002).

Shortly after the first set of deaths, letters purporting to be from the Solar Temple were received by a number of journalists, scholars, and government officials. Aside from outlining aspects of the Solar Temple’s beliefs, these “Testaments” or “transit letters” offered an insight into the motives behind the group’s actions. Those who had died, whether voluntarily or with assistance,¹ had done so in order to travel to Sirius where, it was believed, they would assume glorious “solar bodies.” Moreover, the Testaments also issued a call to other Solar Temple members to join them—a call which was evidently taken:

Men, cry not over our fate, but rather cry for your own. Ours is more enviable than yours. To you who are receptive to this last message, may our Love and our Peace accompany you during the terrible tests of the Apocalypse that await you. Know that from where we will be, we will always hold our arms open to receive those who are worthy of joining us (“To All Those Who can Still Understand the Voice of Wisdom ... We Address this Last Message”).

Although the spectacular nature of the OTS’s self-destruction is both fascinating and curious in and of itself, what makes it particularly interesting is that it occurred at all.

¹ It was later (1996) determined by the Swiss magistrate investigating the Solar Temple deaths that only 15 of the 53 deaths in Switzerland and Quebec were in fact true suicides. These represented a core group of people who saw themselves as “The Awakened.” The remaining deaths fell into two categories; 30 people, dubbed “the Immortals,” who had apparently been lured to a ritual, drugged and then shot; and eight individuals had been executed as “traitors” (Lewis 2005). It is, of course, impossible to determine how many of “the Immortals” were simply aware of what was happening and were “assisted” in their deaths, and how many were simply tricked and murdered. For a discussion, see Palmer (1996), Introvigne (2002), Mayer (2003 [1999]).

From the very beginning the OTS leadership had always held to an apocalyptic vision of the future, believing that the Earth would be destroyed in the near future through some kind of ecological disaster. Drawing on his work in homeopathy, Luc Jouret had claimed in his public lectures that just as disease is a sign of some underlying sickness of the body, pollution is the exterior manifestation of a sickness within planet Earth, which in a manner akin to James Lovelock (1979), he envisaged, as a living entity. Going further, he also spoke of how cataclysmic upheavals in nature were the manifestations of how the Earth was poised on the brink of ecological disaster (Mayer, 2005).²

Nevertheless, despite this pessimistic vision, the Solar Temple's message was optimistic, and, indeed, "fundamentally one of survival and not of death" (Mayer 1998: no pagination). Acknowledging that the planet had reached "the end of a cycle," the order considered its mission to be that of gathering an elect group (referred to in some OTS documents as "Templars of the New Age") who would survive the ecological apocalypse and inaugurate "the Kingdom of Aquarius" (Mayer 1998, 2001). In 1986, for example, the Order published two books entitled *Survivre à l'An 2000 (Survival Beyond the Year 2000)*, the second volume of which dealt exclusively with "survivalist" themes such as how to survive in the aftermath of atomic, bacteriological and chemical warfare attacks (Introvigne 2000). Similarly, in the mid-1980s the OTS had established an "ark of survival" or "survival farm" in Canada, prompted by the belief that the area around Toronto in particular would experience less upheaval in the event of any environmental disaster because it was situated on a broad granite plate with a strong magnetic field (Mayer 2003).

Indeed, not only did the OTS leaders believe that they would survive the Apocalypse, but they also believed that they themselves would serve a role in the transition into the Aquarian Age. Those at the core of the OTS believed that they were an elect group of people who incarnated periodically on Earth to play key roles in the evolution of humanity. One female member, for example, who died in the 1995 transit, claimed that she had "lived since the most remote times," adding that:

the time which was given to me on planet earth is completed and I go back freely and willingly to the place from which I came at the beginnings of the times. Happiness fills me because I know that I have fulfilled my duty and that I can bring back in peace and happiness my capitalised energy enriched through the experience which I have lived on this earth back to the source from which everything comes. (quoted in Mayer 1998: no pagination)

2 This concern about the environment was also shared by Di Mambro and, it appears, by a number of the Solar Temple membership. According to Mayer, Di Mambro kept several video recordings of TV reports about ecological problems and, moreover, he and his wife considered listing an ecological organization in their will (Mayer 1998, 2003). Similarly, one female member who died in the 1995 "transit," wrote in one letter, "I think that our planet is slowly dying and I will do everything possible in order to be with her until the end, insofar as it will be possible" (quoted in Mayer 1998: no pagination).

Why then did an ideology of survival eventually give way to one of death? Why did a group who had gone so far as to publish manuals for its members on how to survive in the aftermath of ABC (atomic, biological, chemical) warfare attacks eventually come to believe that their only chance of survival was to escape the earth prior to the Apocalypse? More importantly, why did the order come to believe that their only chance of survival lay in death? In this chapter, I intend to answer these questions by discussing the role of several “crises of charismatic authority” that occurred within the OTS in the early 1990s.³ These crises, I will show, played a crucial role in transforming OTS ideology from one of optimistic survivalism to a more pessimistic vision emphasizing the necessity of fleeing earth prior to the Apocalypse, and, by extension, were instrumental in precipitating the 1994 transits.⁴

Accounting for the Transits

In the initial aftermath of the 1994 transits, a number of theories were put forward to explain the deaths. According to some conspiracy theories, for example, the OTS members had been murdered and their deaths made to look like suicides in order to cover up a deal made between President Carter and some extraterrestrials who had built an underground laboratory in Nevada (Palmer 1996; Chryssides 1999). Similarly, sections of the press claimed that the order had in fact been an elaborate front for Di Mambro and Jouret who, it was alleged, were international racketeers who had amassed \$93 million in Australia alone through gun running, money-laundering and confidence tricks.⁵ Going further, it was alleged that the transits were an attempt by both men to dispose of the order’s inner circle and make off with their ill-gotten gains. Other sections of the French-speaking press made immediate connections between the incident and other examples of “cult suicides.” Thus, in the week following the 1994 transits, leading Swiss French-language newspapers consistently applied the countercult stereotype to the incident; labeling the order a “cult,” dismissing its ideas as “fanaticism,” “delirium,” and the “manipulative ideas of a guru,” and describing members as “weak,” “marginal,”⁶ “sheeplike,” and

3 Several of these themes were initially presented in Walliss, J. (2004).

4 This is, of course, a separate question from what made this option convincing to those OTS members who went along with the transits voluntarily. See Chapter 8, this volume for a discussion of this issue.

5 Interestingly, similar claims were also made about the Ugandan Movement for the Restoration for the Ten Commandments of God following their deaths in March 2000 (see Walliss, 2004, Chapter 6).

6 Socially, the OTS members were, however, anything but marginal. At its peak (1989) the order had 442 members, the majority of whom were wealthy, educated, and influential members of the middle and upper classes. Among those who died in the 1994 transits, for example, were a mayor of a Quebec town, a wealthy Geneva businessman, a retired sales manager for the Swiss watch corporation Piaget, a high-ranking official in the Quebec government, and a reporter for a Quebec newspaper (see Palmer 1996; Introvigne 2000; Wessinger 2000a; Chryssides 2005).

“gullible.” It was also claimed that the members had been brainwashed by Jouret and Di Mambro (Campiche 1995; Introvigne 2000; Introvigne and Mayer 2002).

If, however, we are to believe the material left behind by the OTS, the transits were a response to a very real sense of opposition and persecution—or “concentration of hate”—that the order felt it was encountering.⁷ In one audiotape, for example, recorded shortly before the transits, Di Mambro is heard to say:

we are rejected by the whole world. First by the people, the people can no longer withstand us. And our earth, happily she rejects us. How could we leave [otherwise]? We also reject this planet. We wait for the day we can leave ... life for me is intolerable, intolerable, I can't go on. So think about the dynamic that will get us to go elsewhere. (quoted in Wessinger 2000a: 225)

Likewise, a file found on Di Mambro's computer at Salvan reads:

We don't know when they might close the trap on us ... a few days? A few weeks? We are being followed and spied upon in our every move. All the cars are equipped with tracing and listening devices. All of their most sophisticated techniques are being used on us. While in our house, beware of surveillance cameras, lasers and infra-red. Our file is the hottest on the planet, the most important of the last ten years, if not the century. However that may be, as it turns out, the concentration of hate against us will give us enough energy to leave. (quoted in Wessinger 2000a: 218)

These feelings of paranoia and persecution are further evinced in the Testaments. In one entitled “To Lovers of Justice,” and addressed “to those who, in this rotten world, remain devoted to justice and truth,” the authors rail against “the political-judicial scandal perpetuated against the Order of the Solar Temple ...,” claiming that Jouret and others “were the victims of slander and false accusations of the most sordid kind for many months” Going further, it claims that several unnamed Solar Temple members were also “submitted to hateful harassment (lengthy interrogations, public arrests, blackmail, pressure from the mass media, the use of false documents ...). Not even their children were spared.” Indeed, toward the end of the document, the author(s) go so far as to link the persecution encountered by the order with the existence of a New World Order conspiracy:

We affirm that to conceal their political, economical, social, and police bankruptcy, governments use the same means and process of misinformation, intimidation and manipulation as those that were used in the blackest periods of history. It is sufficient to note all the futile, lying and useless distortions of international authorities concerning current conflicts in the world, in order to convince oneself of the existence of a secret evil organization on a worldwide scale, highly supported financially, and determined to silence or destroy all those who would be likely to interfere with their interests. Warned a long time ago of the existence of this order, we have managed to frustrate their plans

7 This view has also been expressed in several academic discussions of the OTS. See in particular Hall et al. (2000) and Bromley (2002).

concerning us. Thus, despite everything and beyond appearances, the authentic bearers of an ancestral wisdom have been able to perpetuate the Work.

However, although the OTS leadership may have felt that they were persecuted, in reality they received nowhere near the amount of opposition intimated in the above documents. As Mayer observes: “compared with other controversial groups, the Solar Temple encountered very modest opposition; it would be excessive to use the term ‘persecution’, despite what the group’s spiritual testament would have us believe” (Mayer 2003: 217; see also Introvigne 2000: 155; Robbins 2002: 60).⁸

In 1991, Rose-Marie Klaus, the wife of an OTS member, contacted Info-Secte, a Montreal anticult organization with links to the Cult Awareness Network (CAN). Klaus told them about her separation from her husband, Bruno, who had joined another member in a “cosmic marriage,” and how she was attempting to recoup some of the money that she and her husband had donated to the OTS’s Quebec “Ark.” She did not, however, provide enough corroboration or detail for Info-Secte to go public with any accusations. Shortly afterwards, however, Info-Secte received a letter from the president of the Martinique branch of the Association pour la Défense des Familles et de l’Individu (ADFI), requesting information about the OTS. The letter discussed Jouret and the OTS connection with another neo-Templar, Julien Origas (“alias Humbert de Frankembourgde, former head of the Gestapo at Brest”), claiming that the OTS leaders “sit at the extreme right of God.” Going further, it described OTS beliefs regarding planetary catastrophe and expressed concern that several wealthy Martiniquans had sold their worldly goods, left their families, and had moved to Quebec to construct an “arch” [sic] to the new world. Klaus replied to the letter and the following year was invited to Martinique to speak out at various events against the OTS, prompting a number of Martiniquans to go to Canada and demand that the money that they invested in the “Ark” be returned (Hall et al. 2000; Introvigne 2000).

At the same time as Klaus was attacking the OTS in Martinique, several members of the Canadian parliament received death threats from a mysterious terrorist group calling itself Q-37 (allegedly because it included 37 members from Quebec). By a cruel twist of fate, around the time that police were investigating these threats, Jouret asked two OTS members, Jean-Pierre Vinet and Hermann Delorme, to buy three semi-automatic guns with silencers for him. One of the dealers they approached, however, was a police informer and both men were arrested in March 1992 and charged, along with Jouret, with purchasing illegal firearms. Although, at the subsequent trial all three men received light sentences (a fine of \$1,000 each and one year’s unsupervised probation), the incident triggered international police investigations into various aspects of OTS affairs (Hall et al. 2000).

8 For example, in 1984, Jouret had two lines written about him in an anticult movement booklet. Both he and the OTS, however, were omitted from the 1987 edition (Mayer, 2003; Hall et al. 2000).

In this way, the OTS leadership did have some grounds for feeling that things were not going as well as they would have liked. One would be hard pressed, however, to claim that they were experiencing anywhere near the level of opposition which they claimed. While the OTS was the subject of a number of international police investigations, it was surely an exaggeration on their part to believe that their “file [was] the hottest on the planet, the most important of the last ten years, if not the century” and that “all of their most sophisticated [surveillance] techniques are being used on us.” Indeed, Claude Ryan, one of the politicians singled out as a target for the Q-37 plot, apparently rejected any such requests that “religious sects” should be the target of “organized surveillance of a police nature.” Such groups were, he claimed, “perfectly legal and principled” and, as such, “have the right to exist, as have all kinds of associations” (quoted in Mayer 2001c: 446). Why, then, did a level of cultural opposition experienced by a number of New Religious Movements lead the OTS to react in such an extreme way?

Crises of Charismatic Authority

The answer to this question, I would argue, lies within the OTS leadership itself, and relates to several crises of charismatic authority that Jouret and Di Mambro were experiencing at this time—crises which served to exacerbate the effects of any criticism or opposition they encountered. Charismatic authority, as Max Weber and more recently Roy Wallis (1982, 1983) have argued, is by its nature precarious in that it “exist[s] only in the process of originating” and thus is “constantly being proved” (Weber 1947: 364; 1991: 248). In contrast to traditional or legal-rational forms of authority, charismatic authority thus requires constant “legitimation work.” When this does not occur—when, for example, the leader is unable to offer “signs of the miraculous” or feels “forsaken by his God”—(s)he may thus be said to have experienced a “crisis of charismatic authority”. In such situations, the potential for volatility increases (see Dawson 2002).

In the last years of its existence the OTS was undermined by several such crises, all of which in combination served to undermine both its leaders’ authority and, by extension, its “millennial goal” (Wessinger 2000a). Jouret’s reputation, for example, was irrevocably damaged through his connection with the handgun incident and he subsequently found it increasingly difficult to lecture again on the New Age circuit. This not only closed off the OTS’s main avenue of recruitment and income, but also affected Jouret personally. As one member later recalled, following the incident “his mind changed, he was a tired, tired, tired, disappointed, disillusioned person” (quoted in Hall et al. 2000: 135). Police wiretaps of Jouret also, according to Mayer (2003: 215), show that he “was in a depressed mood, constantly complaining about feeling tired and expressing eagerness to leave the world.” Di Mambro was also experiencing a similar loss of charismatic authority, although his stemmed from more natural causes. Approaching his 70th year in the early 1990s, he was not in good health; not only was he suffering from kidney failure (and had to wear incontinence

pads), but he had also contracted diabetes, and begun to experience diabetic fits. He had also been diagnosed with cancer (Palmer 1996; Wessinger 2000a).

Jouret and Di Mambro were also experiencing similar crises on several other related fronts. In 1990, Di Mambro's 29-year-old son, Elie (Elio), discovered that the various supernatural apparitions that appeared during OTS rituals were in fact faked through the use of lasers, slides, and light and sound effects operated by a member called Antonio Dutoit. Dutoit confirmed that this was indeed the case and then left the order; Elie then began to speak about what he had discovered to all who would listen (Palmer 1996; Wessinger 2000a; see also Harriss 1997 for a discussion of some of the items used). Although the fakery was explained as "an unfortunate but necessary way to keep weaker souls within the fold" by some members (Introvigne 2000: 151), many others, already embarrassed by the gun incident, defected and demanded a refund of money they had invested in the order. As one member wrote to Di Mambro late in 1993:

Rumours about embezzlement and various [forms] of skulduggery are propagated by influential ex-members. Many members ... have left or are leaving. They feel their ideals have been betrayed ... It is even said that you have fallen because of money and women, and you're no longer credible. This is very serious for the Order's mission.

There are even more serious grumblings, and you know them. Here they are: everything we saw and heard in certain places has been a trick. I have known this for some time. Tony [Dutoit] has been talking about this for years already ... I have always refused to pay attention to these rumours, but the evidence is growing, and questions are being asked. This calls into question many things I've seen, and messages. I would be really upset if I had to conclude that I'd sincerely prostrated myself in front on an illusion!!! (Quoted in Mayer 2003: 212–13)

If this were not bad enough, Di Mambro was also having difficulties with another of his children, the 12-year-old "cosmic child" Emmanuelle. Raised from birth to be the avatar of the New Age, by 1993 Emmanuelle had become what Wessinger (2000b: 28) refers to as "a messiah difficult to deal with"; not only was she rejecting her cosmically assigned role, but she was also becoming unruly and expressing an interest in teenage pop culture. She was also, Di Mambro believed, under threat from the Antichrist, who had been born to Antonio and Nicky Dutoit in the summer of 1994. Following a miscarriage, Di Mambro had forbidden Nicky Dutoit to bear children. However, after leaving the OTS and moving to Quebec, she had given birth to a son who was named Christopher Emmanuel. Viewing this as a double affront to his authority, Di Mambro is said to have ordered that the family be "symbolically executed" shortly before the 1994 transits by Joel Egger, with the Genouds as his accomplices (Palmer 1996; Hall et al. 2000).

Discussion

The decision by the OTS leadership to abandon its belief in survivalism in favor of an ethos emphasizing the necessity of escaping from Earth through death prior to the Apocalypse, may thus be seen as a clear response to a feeling of persecution, exacerbated by the effects of several crises of charismatic authority within the order. At around the time that the order came to the attention of the authorities, Di Mambro's metaphysical world was beginning to collapse around him. Not only was he seriously ill, but his charisma had been thoroughly undermined by the revelations of technological fakery and the subsequent defections. It was also becoming more and more apparent to those within the order that Di Mambro was not in contact with occult masters, hidden deep beneath Zurich as he claimed. If this were not bad enough, Di Mambro had also been exposed as a fraud by his own son, and the child that he and the order had raised to be the avatar of the New Age was not only rejecting her messianic mission in favor of teenage pop culture, but was also—he believed—in danger from the three-month-old Dutoit “Antichrist.” Defections were also crippling the order financially and undermining everything that he and Jouret had sought to achieve.

In this way, the highly ritualized nature of the transits can also be understood as an attempt by Jouret and Di Mambro to salvage some honor by producing a charismatic display or symbolic gesture to the world (Palmer 1996; Mayer 2003). For example, Mayer quotes the following audio-recording of a conversation between Jouret and Di Mambro made shortly before the transits:

Di Mambro: People have beaten us to the punch, you know.

Jouret: Well, yeah. Waco beat us to the punch.

Di Mambro: In my opinion, we should have gone six months before them ... what we'll do will be even more spectacular.

(Mayer 1998: no pagination; emphasis added)

Through their fiery deaths, he argues, the OTS leadership hoped, like the original Knights Templar, to create an enduring legend for themselves:

Joseph Di Mambro, Luc Jouret, and those who, over the course of months, methodically prepared their own deaths and the deaths of dozens of others were quite concerned about the impact their departure would have on the public mind and spent many hours creating a kind of legend that would survive their earthly exit. Why else would they have felt the need to send manifestos justifying post mortem their decision not only to order members but also to television stations, newspapers, and some other correspondents ... [?] (Mayer 2003: 208).

On one level, the transits may thus be conceptualized as an example of what Mark Juergensmeyer terms “performance violence.” According to Juergensmeyer, while

on one level such acts of spectacular violence are “*performative acts*, insofar as they try to change things,” on another level “such instances of exaggerated violence” may also be conceptualized as actions intended to make a symbolic statement to their audience:

The very adjectives used to describe acts of religious terrorism—symbolic, dramatic, theatrical—suggest that we look at them not as tactics but as performance violence. In speaking of terrorism as “performance violence”, I am not suggesting that such acts are undertaken lightly or capriciously. Rather, like religious ritual or street theatre, they are dramas designed to have an impact on the several audiences that they affect. Those who witness the violence—even at a distance, via the news media—are therefore part of what occurs. Moreover, like other forms of public ritual, the symbolic significance of such events is multifaceted; they mean different things to different observers. (Juergensmeyer, 2001: 124, 122; italics in original)

Similarly, Mayer notes how, in some cases, “staging a spectacular action allows a small group to attract the attention of the world and may to some extent be intended to reach that goal” (Mayer 2003: 365). In particular, he goes on, “a spectacular action may ... [alongside other motives] ... constitute a tempting option for a group that is *experiencing decline or has not met the success for which it had hoped*” (emphasis added). From this perspective, the transits may thus be seen as one last spectacular ritualistic gesture to the world, through which the OTS leadership could reassert their authority over their followers and create some kind of legend for the order.

On another level, the transits may also be viewed as an attempt to save the many secrets and, indeed, “secrets within secrets” on which the group was built. As one unnamed source, cited by Palmer observes:

The suicide was organised to save their secrets. The whole group was built on everyone having secrets—secrets within secrets. Every time the police came to Morin Heights, members trembled lest they stumble upon the crypt in the basement, or desecrate their sacred temples and brotherhood rooms in Geneva. One word to the wrong source, one traitor or indiscretion, and all their secrets might be revealed. (Palmer 1996: 314)

From this perspective, then, the transits were thus also “a purification ritual that guarded OTS secrets and preserved their magical energy” (ibid.). Two main pieces of evidence would seem to support this view. Primarily, the transit fires were supposed to destroy all evidence of the OTS, including even the bodies of the members, leaving behind only the Testaments as their legacy (Mayer 2003). Indeed, one of the Testaments expresses a fear of “our bodies ... being soiled by frantic lunatics.” Second, drawing on the conclusions of the magistrate who investigated the 1994 deaths, Palmer (1996) notes that they were organized in a highly ritualized way, designed to progressively “seal” the OTS “core” in three stages. Primarily, the ritual “execution” of the apostate Dutoits at Morin Heights effectively “sealed” the outer, most “polluted” layer. Following on from this, “the middle ring of fire at Cheiry included those whose purity/pollution status was mixed or ambiguous” (ibid.) and who had to be assisted in taking their lives. Finally, the inner, most awakened/pure

members, such as Di Mambro, Jouret, and Bellaton, consciously took their own lives at Les Granges-sur-Salvan.

Conclusions

In their discussion of the OTS, Introvigne and Mayer warn against focusing on one single factor in accounting for the murder-suicides. Rather, they argue, the deaths were the result of four key factors working in combination: “[a] predisposing apocalyptic ideology, perception of external opposition, internal dissent and apostasy, and crumbling charismatic authority of the leader” (Introvigne and Mayer 2002: 178). Indeed, although acknowledging that an emphasis on the role of crises of charismatic authority “has its merits” in understanding the initial murder-suicides, they argue—rightly in my view—that such an explanation is of little or no use in understanding the subsequent suicides. Rather, and again I would agree with them on this, the subsequent suicides may be better understood as a consequence of external opposition. As one member, for example, who took his life in the 1997 suicides wrote to his family:

We have been hunted down like dogs because what we were telling, what we are relating, disturbs at a high level ... we are relieved to know that we as well as our children will no more have to endure the craziness of this earthly world. Don't believe anything that you read about us. (quoted in Mayer 1998: no pagination)

However, conversely, I would argue that external opposition by itself is of little or no use in understanding the motivation for the initial transits. Rather, while not discounting the role of perceived external opposition, the focus of attention should be more on the role of internal pressures in precipitating the initial murder-suicides, not least because the OTS's ideology began to develop in the direction of fleeing planet Earth prior to the experience of cultural opposition. As Mayer notes, “the idea of there being no other way than leaving the earthly spheres seems to emerge strongly in the months and years after the order met its first serious internal dissent, with people leaving it who had belonged to the communal core” (Mayer 2001: 447–8). It is also noteworthy, he argues, that the order did not lash out at any of its perceived enemies in the outside world—as did, for example, Aum Shinrikyo or the People's Temple—but rather reserved their wrath for those deemed to be “traitors” (or “the bastards who have betrayed us,” as Di Mambro refers to them on one audio recording made shortly before the transits [Mayer 1998]), such as the Dutoits.

These internal pressures—most, if not all, of which were fundamentally bound up with the progressive undermining of Di Mambro and Jouret's charismatic authority—distorted the OTS leaders' perception of the outside world, leading them to see affronts, opposition, plots, and conspiracies where arguably there were none, and to radically revise their view of salvation. Rather than seeking to survive the ecological apocalypse, they would, instead, abandon the world to its fate and effect a transit “with all lucidity and in full consciousness” to their home in the stars. There,

according to Testament *Transit to the Future*, they will await “favorable conditions for a possible Return.” As another of the Testaments, The Rose+Croix, enigmatically suggests, “The Rose+Croix has definitely not finished surprising you”:

Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed and everything is renewed in a Space–Time continuum. Alternately hunted down and adulated, the Immortal Rose+Croix will follow its path more than ever. Its mission will remain forever and ever. (See Appendix 1)

Chapter 7

Sources of Doctrine in the Solar Temple

George D. Chryssides

Explaining mass death within a religion is not easy, especially where some degree of voluntariness appears to have been involved. Survival, rather than self-destruction, is a basic human instinct. When mass deaths occur within religions—and the frequency of their occurrences has been much exaggerated by the anticult movement—they must either be involuntary acts of murder, or else they must be forms of suicide where the victims have been persuaded that death will be highly advantageous. Explaining the deaths in the Solar Temple is problematic, since the extent of the participants' voluntariness is unclear. Plainly, it is not possible to commit suicide with several bullet wounds in one's own head; yet the circumstances of the deaths in Cheiry and Granges-sur-Salvan in 1994 indicate that the members were taking part in a ritual, and the dress and the position of the corpses indicate an absence of resistance or attempt to escape.

Although mainstream Christianity, particularly in its Protestant evangelical forms, emphasizes the importance of orthodox belief, many new religious movements—as well as old ones—do not attach such importance to maintaining creedal orthodoxy or doctrinal consistency. In his analysis of religion, Ninian Smart (1995) identified a number of elements—or “dimensions,” as he called them—which make up a religion: the doctrinal, the mythological, the experiential, the ethical, the ritual, and the social-institutional. Of these six dimensions, the ritual and the experiential were arguably the most important to the Order of the Solar Temple (*Ordre du Temple Solaire*, or OTS), access to these being controlled by the movement's social-institutional spiritual hierarchy. Doctrines were relegated to a secondary role; as Susan Palmer, following Mary Douglas's typology, puts it, the OTS exemplified “strong group, weak grid” (Palmer 1996: 304).

It is possible that the group thrived on ceremony without any strong doctrinal underpinning, and it has been suggested that the multiple deaths are capable of being explained without reference to the group's teachings. Thus, Susan Palmer suggests that its leader Joseph Di Mambro experienced a loss of personal charisma as a result of his deteriorating health and internal conflicts within the organization. Certainly the OTS had encountered problems. Within its own ranks, Antonio (Tony) Dutoit,—who had taken sole responsibility for the technology that created the remarkable apparitions in the OTS's underground chamber in Cheiry—had affirmed that they had merely a natural technological explanation, and were not authentic appearances of Ascended Masters. He had left the organization in 1991, although he continued to provide technological support to the OTS. His new-born son had been

named Immanuel, as a rival to Di Mambro's offspring Emmanuelle, who had been regarded as the "cosmic child," and Di Mambro had designated the Dutoit infant as the Antichrist. In the same year, Lucien Zecler of the Association for the Defense of Families and Individuals (ADFI—the leading French anticult organization) had commenced inquiries concerning the movement. In Martinique and Canada, the OTS had received negative media publicity, and in 1993 two OTS members, together with the co-leader Luc Jouret, had been arrested and convicted for buying handguns. Three members who had become disenchanted with the Solar Temple had wanted refunds of their financial input over the years, and one member had evidently been blackmailing Di Mambro. It is possible, therefore, that Di Mambro's solution to these mounting problems was to put an end both to himself and to the organization.

Introvigne and Mayer (2002) question this explanation, pointing out that the subsequent deaths in 1995 and 1997 occurred after Di Mambro's death. (Sixteen members died in similar circumstances at Vercors, Grenoble, on 23 December 1995, and a further five were found dead at Saint-Casimir, Quebec on 21 March 1997.) Indeed, although the Solar Temple attracted some opposition and faced these problems in 1994, a proposed solution entailing either collective suicide or mass murder seems seriously disproportionate.

Equally, attempts to explain the deaths by "brainwashing," "mind control" or guru manipulation are implausible. The Solar Temple was not a "typical cult": it did not attract the vulnerable or the dispossessed. Instead, supporters tended to be drawn from the higher echelons of society, and included successful business people, an orchestral conductor, and a mayor. Although the OTS's premises at Salvan and Cheiry were somewhat remote, the community itself was not isolated: although Di Mambro's earlier organization, the Golden Way Foundation, facilitated community living, the house was in a Genevan suburb and hosted meetings for non-members, and those who participated in the ceremonies at Cheiry and Salvan combined the OTS's activities with pursuit of their own secular work.

Social science tends to look for "causes" of human behavior. However, although natural and social environment have some bearing on the outcome of human events, it seems likely that the Solar Temple's worldview had a much greater role in these events, and that the group's key ideas resulted in their "exit." As Mayer writes:

the fact that several more members chose the same way to die (i.e. "transit" to another world, as they euphemistically described their deaths) at a later time demonstrates how strong the doctrinal justification had succeeded in becoming in the eyes of some followers. (in Partridge 2004: 348)

In what follows, I shall argue that there is a clearly identifiable worldview associated with the Order of the Solar Temple, and that the intellectual and spiritual pedigree of the group can help to explain the notorious collective deaths of 1994, 1995, and 1997.

The Beliefs of the Solar Temple

Outlining the beliefs of the Solar Temple is problematical for several reasons. Firstly, it was an esoteric group, and it is difficult to ascertain the beliefs of a group whose teachings can only be understood through privileged access. Such access was through what Massimo Introvigne calls a “Chinese box” system: initially one joined the Amenta Club (subsequently known simply as Amenta), progressing through the Archedia Club to the International Order of Chivalry Solar Tradition (OICST). It seems likely that most of the dead belonged to the ranks of the spiritually most adept: of the 53 dead at Morin Heights, Cheiry, and Salvan, 15 appear to have been “awakened ones” and 30 “immortals.” If this is so, then members left behind were those who lacked access to the key ideas of the group; and additionally, because of the stigma now attached to being an OTS member, most are reluctant to talk about their experiences. Inevitably, conspiracy theories abound: one such theory is that the deaths were part of a CIA cover-up; the subterranean chambers were really built by extraterrestrials, and the then US President Jimmy Carter wished to ensure that word did not get out!

Notwithstanding these problems that hamper serious investigation, a number of sources remain available to us, and can enable us to reconstruct the Order of the Solar Temple’s worldview. Both Di Mambro and Jouret were associated with several Templarist and Rosicrucian organizations, whose ideas and practices can be readily ascertained. Additionally, material is available in the “transit letters” (otherwise known as the “Testaments”)—communications sent to the media by a small number of members before the deaths took place. The Swiss historian of religion Jean-François Mayer, who had been researching the group before the notorious incidents, attended some of Jouret’s lectures, and has published material drawing on their content. Of course, it is also important to acknowledge the existence of religious creativity: new movements do not simply reiterate the teachings of parent organizations, and the fact that the OTS was the only neo-Templarist organization to bring about these multiple deaths indicates that its leaders added their own distinctive contribution to the group’s spiritual pedigree.

The rudimentary ideas and history of the OTS are fairly widely known. It was taught that a Blue Star appeared some 26,000 years ago. This star—Sirius—was the home of a number of Ascended Masters, also known as the Great White Brotherhood, who came to earth, and inhabited a subterranean spiritual realm known as Agartha. These Masters are essentially souls, but can occasionally manifest themselves in corporeal form: in the underground chambers of the Solar Temple privileged members could be granted the opportunity to witness these epiphanies, although it is beyond doubt that the visions afforded to these initiated members were the ingenious creations of Antonio Dutoit, an expert in the production of holographic images. Like the Masters, humans are inherently souls rather than bodies, and the bodies they possess are temporary abodes: on death the soul moves on from one corporeal manifestation to another. Thus reincarnation was one of the OTS’s key tenets, a process to which Ascended Masters and humans alike were subject. Luc Jouret

claimed to be a reincarnation of St Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of the Knights Templar, and Joseph Di Mambro claimed various past incarnations, including one of the Egyptian Pharaohs, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, the Roman soldier who pierced Jesus' side at the crucifixion, and Manatanus—one of the Ascended Masters. (It is not clear how it is possible for Di Mambro to have experienced two past existences with substantial temporal overlapping, the apostle and the Roman soldier: either this is a misunderstanding on the part of informants, or, equally plausibly, Di Mambro may have had little regard for doctrinal consistency.) A small spiritual elite could become capable of decorporealizing, according to their degree of initiation within the Temple; corresponding to the three levels of membership were three levels of initiation—initiates, awakened souls, and immortals.

The history of the universe from the Blue Star's appearance onward was held to be divided into a number of astrological ages. In common with many other occultists and New Age groups, the OTS held that the earth was on the cusp between the outgoing Age of Pisces and the dawning Age of Aquarius. This emergent New Age would herald an apocalypse, in which the Earth would be destroyed by fire, and hence the group's aim was to produce a communion of souls who would survive this fiery ordeal. In order to achieve this aim, sex magic appears to have been involved. Sex magic entails the use of sexual activities to obtain spiritual benefits, and Di Mambro had an obvious interest in this area of the occult. One important rite within the Temple was "cosmic marriage"—a ceremony in which selected members were paired and underwent a ceremony which supposedly bonded their discarnate archetypal forms. Di Mambro underwent such a ceremony, in which he was bonded with Dominique Bellaton (1958–94), who was believed to be an incarnation of the Egyptian princess Hatshepsut.

At this point messianic imagery appears to feature, although its exact role is far from clear. Di Mambro and Bellaton gave birth to a daughter, whom they named Emmanuelle (1982–94). This child was regarded as special, and was known as a "cosmic child" and sometimes as an "avatar." Although biologically female, Emmanuelle was always referred to as "he": it is said that the group held that spirits had no gender, although this is difficult to reconcile with ideas of cosmic marriage, or with the group's concepts of Ascended Masters, who appear to be inherently gendered, and whose various incarnational manifestations appear to be gender-consistent. The precise salvific role of the cosmic child is unclear, but "he" appears to have been the object of extraordinary veneration by OTS members, with a unique role admitting no rival: Emmanuelle underwent a special baptism with water from the River Jordan and chrismal oil from Jerusalem. When Antonio and Nicky Dutoit, whom Di Mambro had forbidden to have children, gave birth to a son whom they named Immanuel, Di Mambro took great exception, and the child was referred to as the Antichrist. The Dutoits left the group in 1991, although Antonio continued to offer his technical support. Shortly before the mass deaths, the Dutoit family were hunted down, probably by Jouret, and were found dead in their homes. The baby had been stabbed repeatedly, and a stake nailed through his chest.

The Templar Tradition

A search for explanations is plainly necessary, and in what follows I hope to show why the OTS leader thought it necessary for the group to end by death. In order to do this, I propose to look at a number of movements that had an important influence on the Temple. The most obvious of source of beliefs and practices is Templarism. The original Knights Templar were formally established by Pope Innocent II (1130–43), who gave them exemption from all earthly authority (except papal authority). The Cistercian Abbot Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153) was appointed to lead the crusades against the Muslims, with the specific purpose of returning the City of Jerusalem to the Christians. The Templars provided the ancillary service of offering physical protection to Christian pilgrims to Jerusalem, since their journey was extremely hazardous. They offered particular protection for money, and became the first European bank, offering the facility to deposit one's wealth at one location and to collect it at another. After the crusades, the Templars returned to their chapters, and continued to engage in secret meetings and rites.

The early fourteenth century marked a turn in the Templars' fortunes. Having an eye on the wealth amassed by the Templars, Philip IV ("the Fair") of France (1268–1314) conspired with the pope to disband the Templars as a means of appropriating their wealth. The Templars thus became the victims of conspiracy, being accused variously of heresy, blasphemy, and homosexuality. Pope Clement V (c.1264–1314) formally disbanded them in 1312 by his papal bull *Vox in Excelso*. A few remaining Templars relocated to Portugal; there they established the Order of Christ, but it is doubtful whether any line of succession exists from Jacques de Molay, the Templars' last Grand Master, to the more recent Templar movement that was revived in the late eighteenth century.

Although formally disbanded, many modern-day Templars claim that the movement lived on clandestinely. Some sources claim a covert lineage, while others claim that the emergent Freemasons provided a method of propagating the succession; others again maintain that the links between former and present-day Grand Masters are transmitted psychically rather than physically. This last explanation was the one favoured by the OTS and its precursors. The physician Bernard-Raymond Fabr -Palaprat (1773–1838) is regarded as the founder-leader of modern Templarism when the movement experienced a revival in the late eighteenth century. The French Revolution eliminated royal opposition to the movement, but ecclesiastical opposition prevailed. Fabr -Palaprat established his own rival "Johannite" Church, which was based on the teachings of a book entitled the *Levitikon*, a second-hand copy of which he claimed to have discovered and purchased at a Paris bookstall on New Year's Day 1814. The *Levitikon* purports to be authored by a fifteenth-century Greek monk called Nicephorous, and is based on the Gospel of John, but omitting reference to Jesus' resurrection, miracles, or messianic status. The book included a commentary entitled the *Evangelikon*, which made reference to Jesus' "lost years": he allegedly spent his youth in Egypt, where he became a priest of Isis and gained initiation into the Egyptian mysteries. Attempts were made to associate the "Johannite heresy"

with the Hospitallers—organizations that acted as auxiliaries during the crusades by offering care to sick or injured pilgrims.

Fabr -Palaprat claimed to have discovered an unbroken lineage of Grand Masters, running from Jacques de Molay to himself. A “Charter of Transmission” had allegedly been discovered around this time, which named Jean M. Larmerius as successor to de Molay, and provided a coded set of signatures naming a line of descendants. Fabr -Palaprat secured ordination as an “irregular bishop”—that is to say, someone who is ordained in the Church’s apostolic session, and in the correct manner, but without the Church’s authority. Such ordinations are therefore considered “valid,” but not “legal”. As Introvigne observes, neo-Templarism thus became intertwined with various independent Christian-related organizations with irregular bishops. Luc Jouret, he believes, was probably not consecrated as an irregular bishop within these traditions, but was possibly an “irregular” priest.

Theosophical Strands

Other important components of the Solar Temple’s ideas came from Theosophy, and perhaps more especially from Rosicrucianism. The two movements are interrelated, and cannot truly be disentangled when attempting to establish the Solar Temple’s sources.

The influence of the Theosophical Society, although now considerably in decline, lives on in numerous emergent spiritual movements. Founded by “Madame” Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–91), Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907), and William Q. Judge (1851–96), the Theosophical Society had the professed aims of investigating “unexplained laws of nature”—that is to say, paranormal powers with which individuals are endowed; additionally, its membership aimed to study “comparative religion, philosophy, and science.” Blavatsky’s early interests included ancient Egyptian religion, and her book *Isis Unveiled* (1877) combines ancient Egyptian ideas with those of Eastern spirituality. Blavatsky’s later work *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) was influenced substantially by her travels with Olcott across India and Ceylon, and draws largely on her knowledge of Hinduism and Buddhism which she acquired during that period, and which was not publicly known or disseminated in the West at that time. Blavatsky’s interest in ancient Egypt bears obvious importance for the subsequent development of the Rosicrucian movement, and hence for the ideas of the OTS.

The Theosophical Society was also renowned for its belief in the Ascended Masters, another key concept within the Solar Temple. Blavatsky wrote about “mahatmas” or “adepts,” who were supernatural beings with whom she claimed to have established contact. These mahatmas were enlightened beings, now free from the cycle of birth and rebirth, but who chose to contact selected humans from their celestial abode in order to help humankind. They later came to be known as “Ascended Masters” or the “Great White Brotherhood.” Ascended Masters include leading figures from the Judaeo-Christian tradition—for example, Abraham, Moses,

Solomon, Jesus Christ, and the Virgin Mary—as well as leaders of other major religions, such as Lao Tsu (the founder of Taoism), Confucius, and the Buddha. Other celebrated human thinkers were regarded as enlightened: examples include Plato, Jakob Böhme (1575–1624), Roger Bacon (c.1214–92), and the magician-adventurer Alessandro Cagliostro (1743–95). Other Ascended Masters do not appear to have an accredited historical existence: Blavatsky claimed contact with Master Morya and Koot Hoomi (Kut Humi). One Ascended Master who features largely in the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), as well as several other spiritual groups influenced by it, is the Comte de Saint-Germain (c.1710–84). Saint-Germain appears to have been a Portuguese Jew, nicknamed “The Wonderman” on account of his remarkable adventures. He is believed to have been the founder of Freemasonry, into which he initiated Cagliostro. Among other accomplishments, he apparently was a chemist, renowned for his claim to have discovered secret methods for eliminating flaws in diamonds, and for metamorphosing metals. (The importance of alchemy will be discussed in the next section.)

After the demise of the Theosophical Society’s founder-leaders, a number of successors developed Blavatsky’s ideas. Of particular interest to the present discussion is Alice A. Bailey (1880–1949), at first a Theosophical leader, but subsequently expelled from the Society, principally on account of the ideas that related to her idiosyncratic version of Christianity. Once outside the Theosophical Society, she founded her own organization, known as the Arcane School. In common with the early Theosophical founder-leaders, she claimed to have contact with Ascended Masters, in particular a spiritual being named Djwahl Khul, who worked in association with Master Morya and Koot Hoomi, and from whom her writings were allegedly channeled. (Djwahl Khul, also known as “the Tibetan,” does not correspond to any known historical character.) The first of these channeled writings was entitled *Initiation: Human and Solar* (1922). In this work Bailey taught of humankind’s debt to advanced spirits inhabiting the Sirius star system. She wrote:

First and foremost is the energy or force emanating from the sun Sirius. If it might be so expressed, the energy of thought, or mind force, in its totality, reaches the solar system from a distant cosmic center via Sirius. Sirius acts as the transmitter, or the focalizing center, whence emanate those influences which produce self-consciousness in man. During initiation, by means of the Rod of Initiation (acting as a subsidiary transmitter and as a powerful magnet) this energy is momentarily intensified, and applied to the centers of the initiate with terrific force; were it not that the Hierophant and the two sponsors of the initiate pass it primarily through their bodies, it would be more than he could stand. This increase of mind energy results in an expansion and an apprehension of the truth as it is, and is lasting in its effects. It is felt primarily in the throat center, the great organ of creation through sound. (Bailey in 1922: 99, italics in original)

Bailey’s subsequent books introduced the notion of the “reappearance of the Christ.” Jesus, Bailey taught, was a medium whose body was inhabited and used by the Christ. This Christ would reappear sometime toward the end of the twentieth century, to herald a new age and inaugurate a new world in which people’s consciousness

was heightened. The Masters would draw close to humanity, with the Christ heading the spiritual hierarchy. In order for this to happen, the conditions had to be right: these included the configuration of the planets, a spiritual awakening on the part of humanity, and invocation of the Masters.

It is hard to overestimate Bailey's influence on the Solar Temple. In particular, her preoccupation with Sirius and her emphasis on Ascended Masters provided momentum to the modern Rosicrucian revival. Jacques Breyer (1922–96), who heralded the so-called Arginy Renaissance, drew substantially on Bailey's ideas, and Joseph Di Mambro himself used Bailey's Great Invocation to commence OTS ceremonies:

Let the Forces of Light bring illumination to mankind.
 Let the Spirit of Peace be spread abroad.
 May men of goodwill everywhere meet in a spirit of cooperation.
 May forgiveness on the part of all men be the keynote at this time.
 Let power attend the efforts of the Great Ones. So let it be, and help us to do our part.
 (Bailey, 1951: 571)

It is hardly necessary to point out of course, that the New Age Movement, in which Luc Jouret was caught up, also owes a considerable debt to Bailey.

The Rosicrucians

I referred above to the Rosicrucian revival, and it is therefore necessary to examine the role of Rosicrucianism in the development of the Solar Temple. Rosicrucianism derives its name from Christian Rosenkretz (trad. 1378–1484), who allegedly founded Spiritus Sanctum in 1409. The somewhat amazing life of Rosenkretz is recounted in *Fama Fraternitatis* ("Account of the Brotherhood"), first published in 1614—the first extant written source referring to Rosicrucianism. According to *Fama Fraternitatis*, Rosenkretz traveled to Egypt, Arabia, and Morocco, and acquired three principal disciples to whom he passed on his teachings, forming an order in 1407. Spiritus Sanctum was an esoteric society, which allegedly used magical ritual for healing (alchemy), and which, more widely, was dedicated to the improvement of society. It is more likely, however, that Rosenkretz was an entirely fictional character, created some two centuries later by Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654), a Lutheran pastor. Others have named the physician and alchemist Paracelsus (1493–1541) as the founder of the movement. If Rosenkretz ever did exist, and there was a lineage of Grand Masters (Imperators) going back to ancient Egypt, then this would make Rosenkretz an initiate, not the founder-leader. The same observation applies to Paracelsus and Andreae.

Other accounts of the origins of Rosicrucianism place its inception either much earlier or slightly later. According to some sources, it was founded in 46 CE by Ormus, an Alexandrian gnostic who is said to have been converted by St Mark.

Others contend that various ancient Middle-Eastern thinkers, including Plato, Jesus of Nazareth, Philo of Alexandria, and Plotinus, espoused Rosicrucianism. Some branches of Rosicrucianism, including AMORC, suggest that the origins of the movement go back into ancient Egyptian history, especially the Egyptian Mystery Schools of the fifteenth century BCE, and in particular to the pharaohs Thutmose III (fifteenth century BCE) and Akhenaten (fourteenth century BCE). Whatever the authenticity of such a pedigree, such claims signal AMORC's considerable interest in ancient Egypt—a recurring theme in the OTS.

Until the formation of the more modern Rosicrucian orders, Rosicrucianism has been more of a movement than a structured organization. While a number of celebrated individuals have been claimed as supporters—such as Roger Bacon, the Spanish scholar-mystic Raymond Lully (c.1232–1316), Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Paracelsus, Isaac Newton (1642–1727), Spanish theologian-physician Michael Servetus (1511–53), English physician and alchemist Robert Fludd (1574–1637), and René Descartes (1596–1650)—there is no uniform creed or set of practices that they have shared, and not all have welcomed the description. Fludd's and Newton's interests were principally alchemical, believing that the purification of metals mirrored the purifying of one's own life through death and resurrection. Descartes' interests were in medicine and the prolongation of longevity; but he rejected the magical and the mystical.

It is worth noting at this point that alchemy is not necessarily to be understood as a form of primitive science. Although it is typically associated with attempts to transform base metals into gold, to discover a panacea or elixir, to create human life non-biologically, or to discover a philosopher's stone that might accomplish any or all of these, many alchemists from the eighteenth century onward came to regard alchemical discourse as symbolic and metaphorical, and associated more with religious than with scientific goals—an interpretation also supported by Carl Jung. Some alchemists taught that Christ was the philosopher's stone, attaining perfection through death and resurrection. The nineteenth-century “spiritual alchemist” Mary Anne Atwood wrote, “Alchemy is a universal art of vital chemistry which by fermenting the human spirit purifies and finally dissolves it. ... Alchemy is philosophy; it is *the* philosophy, the finding of the Sophia in the mind” (cited in *Encyclopaedia Britannica CD-ROM*, 1999). Alchemy thus offers the key to personal, rather than physical, transformation, which, as I shall argue, was the Solar Temple's fundamental quest.

Roger Bacon's Rosicrucian ideas require some comment, in particular his ideas on astronomy. Bacon was familiar with *Liber magnarum coniunctionum*—a treatise by the Muslim philosopher Albumazar (787–886), a disciple of al-Kindī (d. 870), who combined Greek philosophy with Islam. According to Albumazar, minor planetary conjunctions occur every twentieth year, and major conjunctions every 960 years. Bacon used Albumazar's scheme to postulate a pattern for the birth of famous leaders in human history: dividing this 960-year period into a further three sections, he noted that Alexander the Great, Jesus of Nazareth, Mani, and Muhammad were each born 320 years apart. (The story of the Magi seeing the star of Bethlehem has

been adduced as confirmatory evidence associating the birth of great human leaders with planetary conjunctions.)

It would be simplistic to suggest that the Solar Temple derived its philosophy of history from any one single source. The interest in dividing human history into a series of eons is found not only in Bacon and in the Rosicrucian tradition, but also in astrological zodiacal theories relating to the Pisces–Aquarius transition. They are also to be found in certain forms of Christian thought, and also the Hindu notion of the *yugas* (ages). Christian apocalypticism featured substantially in OTS thought, and on at least one occasion Luc Jouret referred to the Hindu *yugas*, although, as I shall argue, it is unlikely that there was direct Hindu influence on the group. As will be evident, a number of strands of esoteric thinking merge in the Solar Temple, and this brief sketch of Rosicrucian thinking highlights the ways in which gnostic Christianity, ancient Egyptian religion, and alchemy blend.

Modern Revivals of Templarism and Rosicrucianism

The more recent revivals of Templarism and Rosicrucianism are in forms that inextricably intertwine. However, two interrelated organizations are of key importance in the development of the Order of the Solar Temple: the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), and the Renewed Order of the Temple (ORT).

AMORC—the largest present-day Rosicrucian organization—claims to trace Rosicrucianism’s origins back to ancient Egypt, although not in an unbroken physical lineage. Founded as the Rosicrucian Research Society (also known as the New York Institution for Psychical Research) by Harvey Spencer Lewis (1883–1939) in 1904, the organization assumed the name of AMORC in 1915. AMORC’s symbol is a red rose with a gold cross, representing love and secrecy respectively. It is structured into lodges: a lodge required at least 50 members, and was empowered to perform degree initiation rituals. In common with the Order of the Solar Temple, the lodge had two inner sanctums, namely chapters and Pronaoi (*Pronaos* is the Greek for “antechamber”).

Of key importance in the rise of the Order of the Solar Temple was Julien Origas (1920–83), who was a member of AMORC but who came to lead his own Rosicrucian organization, the Renewed Order of the Temple. The ORT was founded in 1970 by Raymond Bernard (1922–96). Bernard was the leader of AMORC in the French-speaking world, but he swiftly gave way to Origas, finally abandoning neo-Templarism in 1972. Origas continued to lead the movement until his death.

A further key figure in the development of the Solar Temple was Jacques Breyer (1922–96), who inaugurated what has come to be known as the Arginy Renaissance. This began in 1952. Breyer claimed to have discovered a mid-eighteenth-century document in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, which supposedly stated that Jacques de Molay, the last Templar Grand Master, had passed on his authority to his nephew Guillaume de Beaujeu, and that Templar relics were to be found in their family estates. Breyer identified Arginy as the original location at which Hughes

de Payens, together with his nine knights, had founded the Order of the Temple on 12 June 1118. No relics were ever found, but Breyer began to organize some workshops in Ergonia, which aroused a certain amount of interest. Breyer also drew on apocalyptic ideas, teaching of an imminent destruction and the possibility of escape; he mentioned 1995 as the year in which this would take place, although he also cited other dates. Together with Maxime de Roquemaure, who claimed to be descended from a branch of medieval Templars, he established the Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple on 24 June 1966, and it was incorporated in Monaco the following year.

Breyer's organization was distinctive in a number of ways. He created clubs, which provided a means of introducing seekers to his Templar group, and of spreading the ideas of Templarism. Unlike traditional Templarism, which claimed to trace a physical lineage of Grand Masters, the Solar tradition was based on presumed psychic contact with spirits of the medieval Templars, with whom it continued to encourage mediumistic communication. Belief in psychical communication provided an effective means of solving the problem of the unbroken tradition of Grand Masters: Templarism's past Masters could re-emerge in apparitional form and participate in initiations. Breyer also drew to a considerable degree on Alice A. Bailey's writings, and his organization, which gave rise to the OTS, laid emphasis on communication with the Ascended Masters, the star-cluster Sirius as their point of origin, and the apocalyptic elements to which Bailey had attached great significance.

Joseph Di Mambro's connections with AMORC and with Breyer's movement are well accredited. He joined AMORC in 1956 and remained a member until 1970, by which time he had become associated with the Arginy movement. He had become a teacher of the occult, and in 1978 he established the Golden Way Foundation. This organization was open to the public, and thus provided a means of introducing the uninitiated into Templarism. The Foundation's premises were called The Pyramid, and they also housed the Fraternity. Luc Jouret joined the Golden Way Foundation in 1982.

In 1981 a joint meeting was held between the Renewed Order of the Temple, the Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple (another neo-Templar organization), and the Golden Way Foundation, at which an important ceremony, renewing their Templarist oath of allegiance, was enacted. Di Mambro came to regard this ceremony as the founding ceremony of the Solar Temple. (Introvigne and Mayer, 2002: 177). Luc Jouret was present at this event, and was introduced to Origas. The two established a rapport, and it seems that Origas nominated Jouret as his successor. When he died in 1983, Luc Jouret officiated at Origas's funeral.

After Origas's death Luc Jouret became Grand Master. This caused disquiet to Origas's widow and their daughter Catherine. A split emerged, in which the majority of members followed Catherine, leaving Jouret to establish his own schismatical group in 1984, called the International Order of Chivalry Solar Tradition (OICST), which became the precursor of the Order of the Solar Temple.

Eastern Influences?

One further possible source of OTS philosophy should be considered at this juncture. A few allusions to Eastern religion occur in the Solar Temple's ideas, and this has caused at least one commentator to consider whether religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism played any role in Di Mambro's and Jouret's thinking. One writer goes as far as to classify the OTS as an "eastern cult," stating that "The Order of the Solar Temple is based on Hinduism and 'Reincarnation'" (Dominguez 2004).¹

The OTS made various allusions to concepts that feature in Hinduism. Apart from belief in reincarnation, the "cosmic child" Emmanuelle was sometimes referred to as an *avatar* (in Hinduism, a "descent" of a high deity into physical form—sometimes loosely translated as "incarnation"); and Jouret spoke of the Earth being in its final *yuga*.

To account for the place of such ideas in Jouret's worldview, it is not necessary to go outside the sources of doctrine that have already been identified, together with the familiar *zeitgeist* of New Age thinking. Reincarnation featured significantly in Theosophical ideas, and it was also one of the key principles of Catharism, which the historical Templars' last crusade set out to suppress. Indeed, it has been argued that the Templars themselves accepted recruits from excommunicated members of the Roman Catholic Church, and hence may have had Cathars within their own ranks (Martin 2004: 135). Of course, notions of karma and reincarnation are also widespread within the New Age movement. There is therefore no need to look beyond Theosophy, Templarism, and the New Age to trace this component in the Solar Temple's philosophy.

The OTS's notion of "avatar" does not seem to be used in any profound philosophical sense. As far as we can tell, there is no substantial philosophical underpinning of the notion, and Di Mambro's contrast between the avatar Emmanuelle and the Antichrist Immanuel indicates that he continued to think in quasi-Christian rather than Hindu ways. Similarly, Jouret's use of the term *yuga* is imprecise: in Hindu thought a *yuga* is not a 6,000-year period, but a much lengthier one: in Hindu thought, the *kali yuga*, which is the shortest as well as the most corrupt, lasts for a duration of 432,000 years and still has a considerable period to run before it expires. A period of 6,000 years is much more germane to the Christian and Western astrological views of time, being associated with traditional dates of creation—precisely 4004 BCE according to Bishop Ussher (1581–1656), seven 1,000-year long "days" of creation, and 2,000-year-long astrological ages in which Pisces (the "fish" being the symbol of Christianity) is in the process of giving way to the dawning Age of Aquarius (the "New Age"). Again, there is no need to suspect any direct influence from Eastern thinking.

1 "Eastern Cults", located at <http://religion-cults-com/Cults/Eastern/E-CULTS.htm#solar>; accessed 11 February 2005.

Jouret's 1987 Lecture and the "Transit Letters"

Thus far I have examined external sources relating to the Solar Temple. However, we can also find important information about the Temple from Luc Jouret's own lectures, and from the so-called "transit letters." The "transit letters" were communications written by four OTS members shortly before their deaths, posted to some 300 recipients, including Jean-François Mayer, explaining their motives. According to Mayer, Jouret talked in 1987 about an imminent apocalypse that the Earth was facing; humankind, he affirmed, had reached the end of the *kali yuga*, a 6,000-year period at the end of which there would be ecological disaster. However, a New Age was dawning, and survival was possible if the Earth's inhabitants showed due concern for the environment. The Solar Temple, in fact, went on to set up designated survival centres, in Quebec and in Australia.

Jouret defined the following seven principles as the goals of the Solar Temple. These were derived from the Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple, in virtually unaltered form. Collectively they reinforce the notion of a global predicament, a need for reappraising one's values, and a transition to an ideal state involving a renewed Earth.

- (1) Re-establishing the correct notions of authority and power in the world.
- (2) Affirming the primacy of the spiritual over the temporal.
- (3) Giving back to man the conscience of his dignity.
- (4) Helping humanity through its transition.
- (5) Participating in the Assumption of the Earth in its three frameworks: body, soul, and spirit.
- (6) Contributing to the union of the Churches and working towards the meeting of Christianity and Islam.
- (7) Preparing for the return of Christ in solar glory. (Cited in Peronnik 1975: 147–9)

During this stage of the OTS's development, Mayer notes, Jouret's message was world-affirming and positive: humankind could escape the coming disaster, and there seemed no need to view the world as irredeemable, or to be escaped from by death. Even the reference to Islam in the seven principles is conciliatory rather than confrontational, in contrast with the medieval Templars, and looks forward to an era of religious harmony. There is no allusion to, or even hint of, violence.

This contrasts with the "transit letters," which were world-renouncing and pessimistic about the planet's future. Mayer reports that one of the four "transit letters" rejected the idea of positive creative forces in the earth, recommending withdrawal from the world in the face of coming destruction. Another stated that the group's mission had been interrupted prematurely: the author maintained that the group had been misunderstood, deploring the police investigations of the group and the blackmail to which Di Mambro had been subjected. A third letter spoke of scandals relating to the group, and of the need to punish "traitors."

Reconstructing OTS Teaching

Why was there the change from Luc Jouret's 1987 optimism, which looked forward to a golden age of peace, harmony, and a renewed Earth, to the subsequent pessimism that led to the 1994 disasters? And if there was cause for despair, what function did the mass deaths serve? In the absence of substantial concrete evidence, explaining Jouret's *volte-face* must entail elements of speculation, but a number of factors, internal and external to the group, may well have contributed to the tragedy. In the external world, there was little to inspire confidence in the late 1980s and early 1990s that the Earth was becoming renewed. Although the demise of communism in Eastern Europe had given some religious organizations (including new religious movements) hope of a better world, the process was violent, and other wars marred the planet, for example the Iraq war, and the escalating Arab–Israeli conflict. Jouret may also have felt that there was little evidence that an ecological disaster might be averted. Added to this, the OTS had its own problems, to which Susan Palmer and others drew attention.

As I have suggested, the group's problems are insufficient to explain the disasters. The acceptance of death as the solution must be related to an emergent worldview within the OTS. A number of key themes within the organization, I believe, help to explain Jouret's ultimate solution to their problems. First, I have identified the role of Sirius in the group's thinking. This was the home of the Ascended Masters, who had appeared on earth in discarnate form in the OTS's subterranean chambers. But if the Ascended Masters were not enabling humanity to achieve the golden age on Earth, then it is an understandable step, although perhaps not a justifiable one, to substitute the notion of the transformed Earth to another world—Sirius—to which they would journey. This transit can be viewed in terms of spiritual alchemy: it purported to provide a means whereby the souls of the OTS members could be transformed to perfected beings in this new world.

A second key theme was reincarnation. In the OTS's worldview the soul was the essence of the self, and not the body; and the soul was capable of transmigrating from one body to another. As we have seen, both Di Mambro and Jouret, as well as several leading OTS members, claimed to be reincarnated forms of various spiritual leaders who had previously left their bodies; and conversely a number of the Ascended Masters themselves had once inhabited human bodies, but had now moved on to a higher plane. If humans could end up as spiritual beings on Sirius, this set a precedent for present-day earthly mortals: transition was a realistic possibility. In Chapter 2 of this volume Massimo Introvigne has suggested that the role of fire in the incident was an attempt to ensure that members' bodies were destroyed, to prevent the possibility of souls returning to them.

A third theme was the apocalyptic message. Jouret held that the Earth was in its last days, and probably concluded that it was irredeemable. In common with much traditional apocalyptic writing, Di Mambro and Jouret not only believed in earthly opposition to the group, but also projected this opposition to a supernatural plane: evil forces and an Antichrist were confronting the group, and required more than

conventional ways of being dealt with. Not only did Emmanuel Dutoit have to die, but in a ritual manner that exorcized the evil forces that were at work.

Allied to the apocalyptic message was the final theme of the periodization of human history, and the use of astrology and numerology to reach the conclusion that the Earth was in its last days. Christian apocalypticism, the doctrine of the *yugas* (although evidently misunderstood by Jouret), the Rosicrucian notion of historical eras starting from the Earth's creation, and the astrological evidence of a transition from the Age of Pisces to the Age of Aquarius all pointed to a crucial point in the Earth's history, which the OTS associated with the appearance of the star Sirius. A date sometime near the end of the twentieth century is consistent with a number of millennial end-time calculations, marking variously the end of a 2000-year astrological era (Pisces), the 6,000th year of creation, 2,000 years after Jesus' birth (normally reckoned by historians to be either 4 BCE or 7 BCE), and it is consistent with dates suggested by Bailey and Breyer. There were only short windows of opportunity to make the transition. As Mayer reports, Di Mambro had already acknowledged David Koresh's Waco group (Branch Davidians) as having achieved collective death at this appropriate time, stating that, although the OTS may have slower to achieve this final goal, its exit would be more dramatic. It is not unreasonable to suggest that, like the slightly later Heaven's Gate group, they expected their souls to depart from their bodies and journey to the star Sirius.

Conclusion

Any attempt to reconstruct the worldview of a spiritual group—most of whose initiates are now dead, and whose rites and teachings are esoteric—must inevitably be tentative. What has been outlined above is, I believe, consistent with the known facts about the OTS, and in line with the various traditions on which the group drew. Unless one assumes, contrary to reliable research, that there are spiritual teachers who are capable of mesmerizing and “brainwashing” their followers in such a way as to make them commit suicide for unobvious cynical purposes, one must look to the leaders' and members' worldview to explain their deviant behavior. Although it may be that members of the Solar Temple were drawn to the organization by its rituals rather than its teachings, doctrines provide the underlying rationale for a spiritual group's practices, and, in the case of the Solar Temple, for its untimely end.

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Chapter 8

Death as Initiation: The Order of the Solar Temple and Rituals of Initiation¹

Henrik Bogdan

*Death is the same for us all.
It is how we leave Life that makes the difference.
You must be able to die to the profane world
in order to be born again to the Cosmic World.²*

In the aftermath of the multiple homicides and suicides committed by members of the Order of the Solar Temple (Ordre du Temple Solaire, or OTS), numerous articles have been published in which scholars attempt to provide answers to the question of why the OTS met with such a violent end. The simplistic answers provided by the media and anticult organizations have been challenged by more complex and analytical approaches by various scholars. For instance, Massimo Introvigne and Jean-François Mayer argued that four factors might explain the OTS tragedy, namely predisposing apocalyptic ideology, perception of external opposition, internal dissent and apostasy, and crumbling charismatic authority of the leader (Introvigne and Mayer 2002: 178–83). These four factors should not, however, be regarded as potentially dangerous or violent on their own—it is only when these factors are combined that there is cause for worry. In their comparative study of the OTS with the People’s Temple and Heaven’s Gate, Introvigne and Mayer show that the combination of certain factors could have a lethal outcome irrespective of other apparent differences between the movements. Another example of a scholarly approach is the work of James R. Lewis, who questioned the often-assumed connection between violent movements like the Solar Temple and millennialism and external provocation and instead focused on internal factors such as the failing health of a leader (Lewis 2005).

1 I would like to thank Jean-François Mayer for graciously providing me with copies of the following Solar Temple rituals used as primary sources: *Hermetica Fraternitas Templi Universali: Ceremony of the 4 Elements; Traditional Ritual for the Donning of the Talar; Reception Ceremony*; Order TS: *Ritual for the Donning of the Talar and the Cross; Passage of the Surplice; The Dubbing of a Knight*.

2 Order TS: *Ritual for the Donning of the Talar and the Cross*; see Appendix 2 for the complete ritual.

What these scholars have in common is that they do not advocate a simple “the-one-and-only” explanation, but rather see the complexities and multilevel factors of the case. This approach is adopted in the present chapter, and the aspects of the Solar Temple that will be discussed are not seen as the only relevant ones. Rather, the chapter should be understood as offering a new approach to the multifaceted tragedy of the Solar Temple.

A survey of the literature dealing with the OTS shows that scholars have not been consistent in defining what kind of movement the OTS actually is. Although there seems to be a consensus among scholars that the members of the OTS differed considerably from the preconceived notions of “typical” members of a sect or a cult (OTS members were generally quite wealthy and held important positions in society), it is obvious that the organizational structure of the OTS has baffled scholars. Are we dealing with a doomsday cult, a sect, a new religious movement, a new magical movement, a suicide cult (Lewis 2005), a magical-esoteric religion (Palmer 1996: 303), a Rosicrucian and/or neo-Templar organization (Introvigne 1995: 267), a secret society (Palmer 1996, 304), a magic and gnostic movement (Mayer 1999: 223), or an esoteric new religious movement (Introvigne 2000: 138)? The answer to that question depends, of course, on how these labels are defined and what aspects of the OTS are emphasized. However, in this chapter it will be argued that an essentially overlooked characteristic of the OTS is the fact that it is an initiatory society and that, as such, it belongs to a particular type of initiatory society that has been present in Western culture since at least the end of the seventeenth century: the Masonic initiatory society.

This essay will provide an overview of Western esotericism and Masonic initiatory societies, with a particular emphasis on the notion of death. After this overview, the initiatory system of the OTS will be discussed, followed by an analysis of a number of rituals of initiation found by Mayer in the debris of the OTS lodges in Switzerland. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a discussion of the suicides in relation to Western esotericism and rituals of initiation. It will be suggested that these factors might provide us with a partial key as to why the members of the OTS chose death as the final solution.

The Solar Temple as a Masonic Initiatory Society

The use of rituals of initiation is not an uncommon practice in new religious movements and it can be found both in movements with Eastern roots such as Transcendental Meditation and in those of Western origin, such as the modern witchcraft movement. Even though information published about the rituals of the Solar Temple is limited, these rituals have been described as pseudo-Masonic and neo-Templar. But what does this actually mean?

In discussing the rituals of the Solar Temple we are dealing with a very specific form of initiation ritual: Masonic rituals of initiation. The term “Masonic” should in this context not be interpreted in its restricted sense as referring exclusively

to the Order of Freemasons which was founded in London in 1717. Rather, it refers to a certain type of ritual originating from Freemasonry, but not necessarily having any links to an official Masonic organization (Bogdan 2003). The purpose, the teachings transmitted, and the mythological setting of these rituals vary considerably, but they share a number of components or building-blocks. These components include:

1. the opening of the lodge during which the candidate is not present;
2. admission into the lodge-room in which the candidate answers a number of questions;
3. circumambulations of the lodge, often symbolic of an ordeal;
4. obligation or oath never to divulge the secrets of the degree (often the sign, grip, and word), but often also including certain ethical rules which the candidate swears to observe;
5. formal admission into the degree;
6. instruction in the secrets of the degree (often a sign, grip, and word), but also in the Order's particular teachings;
7. the giving of one or more visible tokens, such as gloves or aprons, sometimes also a new name or motto;
8. closing of the lodge, during which the candidate is present.

These components form the skeleton, as it were, of Masonic rituals of initiation, but the rituals show a wide variety both in terms of length and ritual elaborations. The reason why these rituals are called "Masonic" is the simple fact that it was within the various forms of Freemasonry that they originated and subsequently spread outside the fold of Freemasonry.

The development of the rituals of Freemasonry was a gradual process and the content owed much to the reception rites of medieval English and Scottish guilds of operative stonemasons. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries an increasing number of persons who were not operative stonemasons joined Masonic lodges, and subsequently many lodges became purely non-operative. Four of these non-operative lodges in London decided to form the Premier Grand Lodge of Freemasonry in 1717, and thus the Order of Freemasons was formally created. Our knowledge of the rituals used by the Freemasons in the first decades of the eighteenth century is based on a number of manuscripts and so-called exposures: that is, published texts which aimed at revealing or exposing the secrets of Freemasonry. These early sources are in catechism form, which means that they are in the form of questions and answers. With the publication of Samuel Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* in 1730 the development of the so-called Craft degrees had reached its completion in the sense that there were now three degrees: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. These three degrees form the basis of the initiatory system of Freemasonry even to this day and they center on the themes of birth, life, and death respectively. The mythological setting of these rituals is the Old Testament and the legendary setting centers on the construction of Solomon's Temple. Apart from the

significant fact that Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* is the first exposure to contain the three degrees of Craft masonry, it also contains the first account of the Hiramic legend. The Hiramic legend remains the most important and characteristic legend of Freemasonry to this day and it plays a key role in the third, or Master Mason, degree. Briefly, the Hiramic legend centers on the murder of Hiram, King Solomon's chief architect, who was entrusted with the erection of the Temple of Jerusalem. Hiram had divided his workers into three classes according to their skill and, in order to differentiate among them, each class was given a certain password. Three workers who belonged to the second class wanted to obtain the password of the third class—the master's word. It was Hiram's custom to pray each day inside the uncompleted temple, and the three villains trapped Hiram inside the temple and demanded that he divulge the master's word. Hiram refused, and attempted to escape but the villains struck him forcefully one time each. The third and last blow killed Hiram before he had divulged the master's word and consequently the word—YHVH—was lost. The murderers buried Hiram's body under some shrubs. It did not take long before Hiram's absence was noticed, and King Solomon sent out search parties. Upon finding the body of Hiram, a new master's word was adopted. The new word was *Macbenac*, which is supposed to mean "the flesh falls from the bones" in allusion to the decomposed state of Hiram's corpse. Central to the Hiramic legend is the search for the lost way of pronouncing the name of God and an initiatic interpretation of death.³ As will be discussed further on in this chapter, the candidates were identified with Hiram and in the ritual they symbolically experienced death.

The three Craft degrees spread quickly across the continent, and many lodges were established throughout Europe and in the colonies during the first decades after the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717. It did not take long, however, before new rituals appeared on the Masonic scene. These new rituals—often referred to as High or Additional degrees—were often considered to be completions or elaborations of the Craft degrees. The most characteristic elements of these new degrees are the virtues of chivalry, such as fidelity, courage, and compassion, but it also became increasingly popular to infuse the rituals with Western esotericism. Many of these new rituals were subsequently collected into systems or Rites, such as the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, the Swedish Rite, and the Rectified Scottish Rite. The two most common types of eighteenth-century High Degree Freemasonry are the Scottish or Ecossais degrees, and the Templar degrees. The latter have their origin in France and it is this particular form of Freemasonry that later on in the nineteenth century—directly or indirectly—formed the basis of many neo-Templar orders, which in their continuation can be considered as the antecedents of Order of the Solar Temple.

The Templar degrees of Freemasonry center on the legend of Freemasonry deriving from the medieval Knights Templar. The Order of the Knights Templar,

3 For a discussion of the early development of the Hiramic legend see Snoek, J.A.M. "The Evolution of the Hiramic Legend from Prichard's *Masonry Dissected* to the *Emulation Ritual*, in England and France" (1999).

founded in the first decade of the twelfth century, was disbanded by Philip IV “The Fair” of Bourbon (1268–1314) and Pope Clement V (1264–1314) in the first decade of the fourteenth century, but according to a Masonic legend the Templars survived in the highlands of Scotland and later reappeared to the public as the Order of Freemasons.

The first person to present this theory of continuation was the Scotsman “Chevalier” Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686–1743) who lived as an expatriate in Paris. Ramsay was the orator of the lodge Le Louis d’Argent, whose Worshipful Master was Charles Radclyffe (1693–1746). In a famous oration given at the lodge in 1737, Ramsay stated that Freemasonry was founded by the medieval crusaders in the Holy Land, or Outremer. Ramsay’s oration proved to be a milestone in the development of Masonic rituals of initiation and soon rituals began to appear that incorporated Ramsay’s thesis. It was in the milieu of the Jacobite Parisian lodges that the Masonic Templar degrees first developed, perhaps as early as 1737. The best-known propagator of Templar degrees in Germany was Baron Karl Gotthelf von Hund (1722–76) and it is often claimed that he had been initiated into a Templar degree in France in 1743. On the basis of this initiation, he set up the Rite of the Strict Observance, which consisted of three additional degrees: Scottish Master, Novice, and Knight Templar or Knight of the Temple. Von Hund furthermore introduced a peculiar feature in the structure of his Rite, namely that of the Unknown Superiors or *Superiores Incogniti*. These Unknown Superiors ruled, through von Hund, the Rite of the Strict Observance, and the members of the Rite were expected to strictly observe the decrees of these Superiors. It has been suggested that the actual head of the Rite was none other than the young pretender Bonnie Prince Charlie, Charles Edward Stuart (1720–88). From then on, the presence of Unknown Superiors or Hidden Chiefs became a recurrent theme in many initiatory societies, particularly among Templars and the more esoteric orders such as the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and Aleister Crowley’s (1875–1947) A.:A.:. This idea was picked up by the Solar Temple in which they became known as the Mystical Masters. These masters were seen as the intermediary between the order and God, and it appears that it was believed that the members themselves could become such masters after the “transit.”

During the second half of the eighteenth century Templar degrees flourished on the Masonic scene, but soon enough the Masonic supremacy over the Templar degrees started to be questioned. If Freemasonry is nothing but the medieval Knights Templar in modern form, then why should Freemasonry be required at all if one wanted to be a modern Templar? As Massimo Introvigne⁴ has shown in great detail, the origins of independent neo-Templarism can be traced to Bernard-Raymond Fabr e-Palaprat (1773–1838), who in 1805 proclaimed himself as Grand Master of the Templar Order. By 1980 there existed literally over one hundred rival Templar

4 The reader is referred to Massimo Introvigne’s indispensable “Ordeal by Fire: The Tragedy of the Solar Temple” (1995 and Chapter 2 this volume) for the complex history of neo-Templarism and its connections to the Solar Temple.

orders across a wide spectrum, ranging from social clubs to organizations which indulge in sexual magic (Introvigne 1995: 267–73).

The Solar Temple and Western Esotericism

If we are to believe Introvigne and Mayer (and I see no reason why we should not), the members of the Solar Temple “were literally businesspersons by day and servants of the occult Masters by night” (2002: 176). The relationship between the Solar Temple and Western esotericism has been noted by several scholars, but there has been little discussion as to what this relationship actually consists of.⁵

Western esotericism is a scholarly construct which covers numerous currents that share a family resemblance, and which can be described as a form of holistic spirituality characterized by resistance to the dominance of either pure rationality or doctrinal faith. Instead, the importance of the individual effort to gain spiritual knowledge, or *gnosis*, is often emphasized (van den Broek and Hanegraaff 1998: vii). This *gnosis* is not limited to intellectual or rational knowledge but is rather based on an experiential knowledge that is unconstrained by the limits of the intellect. The path to *gnosis* is often considered to pass through self-knowledge since man is seen as a microcosm of the universe—the macrocosm. Man is created in the image of God and therefore reflects the whole creation. The created universe is usually regarded as emanations of the Godhead, and since man is perceived as a microcosm of the macrocosm, the esotericist believes that the Godhead can be found within man. The quest for self-knowledge is thus also a quest for the divine aspect of existence, just as knowledge about the Godhead by necessity is knowledge about ourselves. The holistic understanding of the universe to be found within Western esotericism is based on the idea that the entire universe is alive and traversed by a network of sympathies and antipathies that link everything in nature (Faivre 1994: 10). The network is often referred to as mystical links and it constitutes the theoretical basis for such esoteric “sciences” as astrology and ritual magic. Today, the most common approach among scholars to the understanding of the term “Western esotericism” is the one proposed by Antoine Faivre in 1992. According to Faivre, Western esotericism should be understood as a form of thought which is characterized by four constitutive components. These four components are required to be present simultaneously in a discourse in order to be able to be labeled as esoteric, and they consist of (1) correspondences which link everything in Nature together; (2) the idea of living Nature; (3) the importance placed on the imaginative faculty and the use of mediating aids such as rituals, symbols, and intermediary spirits; and (4) the experience of transmutation, often understood as the process leading from uninitiated to initiated or enlightened. Besides these four constitutive components

5 For an introduction to the relationship between Western esotericism and new religious movements see Hammer, Olav “Esotericism in New Religious Movements” (2004). For the impact of esotericism on the New Age movement see Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *New Age Religion and Western Culture* (1998), especially 365–524.

Favre adds two secondary or relative components which are not necessarily found in esoteric discourses, but which are nonetheless frequently to be found. The first of these secondary components is the “praxis of the concordance” which implies the notion that all different religious traditions ultimately stem from the same root. The second relative component is the importance attached to the way in which esoteric knowledge is transmitted, for instance from teacher to disciple or in the form of an initiation (Favre 1992: 1994).

These ideas can be found already in late antiquity, particularly in Hermetism and the various forms of gnosticism. However, the majority of scholars working in the field of Western esotericism tend to agree that it was during the Renaissance that esotericism emerged. It was particularly in the intellectual milieu of the New Platonic Academy at Florence that philosophers such as Marsilio Ficino (1433–99) and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463–94) laid the foundation of what today is called Western esotericism. This particular point in history is characterized by an intensified period of syncretism and a number of seemingly divergent religious traditions—such as Christian mysticism, medieval ritual magic, Jewish Kabbalah, Platonism, Neoplatonism, Pythagorism, and Hermetism—were seen as not only compatible with each other but even as different branches of one and the same tradition. From the Renaissance onward a large number of esoteric currents appeared on the scene, and, from the seventeenth century on, some of these currents became intimately associated with secret or closed societies.

Perhaps the earliest, and certainly one of the best-known, examples of an esoteric secret society is the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross, or the Rosicrucians, who allegedly made themselves known to the public at the beginning of the seventeenth century by issuing three short pamphlets or manifestos—the *Fama Fraternitatis* (1614), *Confessio Fraternitatis* (1615), and *Chymische Hochzeit* (1616). In the manifestos it was claimed that there existed a secret brotherhood which had been founded by a certain Christian Rosenkreutz, and that this brotherhood possessed a secret knowledge (which Rosenkreutz had received on his travels in the East) through which a new Reformation could be brought about. More importantly though, the manifestos contained an open invitation to join the brotherhood, although there was no mention of how to get in touch. Today it is generally assumed that there never existed a Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross as it was portrayed in the manifestos, and that the authors of the manifestos were a group of Lutherans, of which only the Protestant theologian Johann Valentin Andreae (1586–1654) has been identified. This fact notwithstanding, during the first decades of the seventeenth century rumors of this mysterious fraternity spread like wildfire across Europe and, soon enough, individuals and groups claiming to be the original Rosicrucians appeared. Many of these groups were in one way or another connected to Freemasonry which had established itself throughout Europe during the 1730s. It was particularly in the high degrees of Freemasonry that Rosicrucian symbolism became fashionable, and Rosicrucianism became increasingly linked to spiritual alchemy. One of the most influential Masonic Rosicrucian Rites to appear on the scene was *Der Orden des Gold- und Rosenkreuzes*, which was founded in the middle of the seventeenth century

in the German-speaking countries. This Rite was a Masonic offshoot of an alchemical brotherhood called *Der Orden des Gülden und Rosenkreutzes*, founded in 1710. Other Masonic Rosicrucian Rites include *The Royal Order of Scotland* (perhaps founded as early as 1741), and later nineteenth-century orders such as *Societas Rosicruciana In Anglia* (founded in 1866) which was, and continues to be, restricted to Master Masons. The end of the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century witnessed a virtual boom of occultist self-styled Rosicrucian initiatory societies all over Europe and the USA, such as *Rosae Rubeae et Aureae Crucis*, the inner order of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (England, 1888); the Cabalistic Order of the Rosy Cross (France, 1888); The Order of the Catholic Rose Cross (France, 1890); the Rosicrucian Fellowship (USA, 1909); the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross (England, 1915); the Ancient and Mystical Order *Rosae Crucis*, AMORC (USA, 1915); and *Lectorium Rosicrucianum*, originally founded under the name *Rozekruizers Genootschap* (The Netherlands, 1924), to name but a few. Rosicrucian influence on the Solar Temple comes primarily through Joseph Di Mambro's membership of AMORC, which he had joined in 1956 and in which he remained as a member for at least 12 years (Mayer 1999: 209). Immediately prior to the transit in 1994 Di Mambro founded in Avignon the ARC which had the double meaning of Alliance Rosy-Cross for the initiates, and the Association for Cultural Research for the public (Introvigne 1999: 304; 2000: 152–3). It is unclear whether the ARC was a reorganization of the Solar Temple or whether it was created as a separate organization.

The Notion of Death in Western Esotericism and Masonic Initiatory Societies

In Western esotericism death is often seen as a symbol of an initiatory passage from one state of being to another, where the candidate is leaving the material world and values behind him to embark on a spiritual quest for enlightenment. This symbolical interpretation is especially common in alchemical literature in which death is seen as a prerequisite of a spiritual resurrection, often connected to the alchemical notion of *putrefaction* (Linden 2003: 17). Death is thus the first stage in the alchemical process which leads from an unenlightened state to enlightenment. Even though no two alchemists appear to be able to agree on what the alchemical process looks like in detail, a frequently recurring description is that it consists of three stages: *nigredo*, *albedo*, and *rubedo*, or the black, white, and red stages. The alchemical process of transmutation is based on the fundamental theory that all material objects and matter consist of various proportions of the four elements, and that these proportions can be manipulated. Gold, which is seen as the purest metal, is considered to be composed of the four elements in perfect balance. From a spiritual perspective, this implies that the qualities which make up our personality need to be in balance in order for us to be able to be united with the Godhead. But in order to cause this manipulation, it is first necessary to “kill” or dissolve (the *nigredo* phase) the original form of the matter one wishes to transmute; or from a spiritual point of view, the old self needs to “die” before it is possible to progress spiritually. In the first stage the material is killed or

putrefied, that is, it is dissolved into its original form, or *prima materia*. According to alchemical theory, there can be no regeneration without corruption, no life without death. This state of dissolution, or mortification, is often symbolized in alchemical imagery by symbols of death and corruption, such as skeletons, skulls, and coffins. In the second or white phase the blackened matter is purified by the mercurial water, the universal agent of transmutation. “The body has been whitened and spiritualized (that is the fixed is volatilized) and the soul has been prepared to receive illumination from the spirit” (Abraham 2001: 5). This stage can also be interpreted as the spirit’s separation from the body, which will reunite when the body is purified and made pure and spotless, and is often symbolized by things pure, white, or silver, such as the moon, snow, and virgins. Finally, in the third or red stage, the spirit is reunited with the white matter. This union is frequently described as a “chemical wedding,” and upon its completion the desirable philosopher’s stone is achieved. Images such as red lions, basilisks, red roses, and the sun often symbolize the *rubedo* phase of the *opus alchymicum*.

The notion of death in alchemy is thus seen as the first step in an initiatory process, but this initiatic interpretation of death is not restricted to alchemy. Death as part of an initiatory process is a recurrent theme in many Masonic rituals of initiation. In Freemasonry the theme of death is especially connected to the third, or Master Mason, degree and its Hiramic legend. As already mentioned, the legend centers on the murder of Hiram Abiff, the architect of King Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. In the ritual the candidate is identified with Hiram and he undergoes a symbolical death, which is often interpreted as the death of the old profane self and the birth of the new spiritual self. Hiram was, furthermore, often interpreted as Christ, which meant that the candidates, through the symbolic death, were united (*Unio Mystica*) with Christ and thereby conquered death and achieved eternal life. A frequent theme in a number of High degrees (especially in Templar High degrees which are often Christian in nature) is the elaboration on the soteriological aspects of the initiatory identification with Christ. Death and resurrection as an initiation also form a regular theme in many Masonic rituals of initiation which are outside the fold of Freemasonry, such as in the Adeptus Minor degree of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn (Regardie 1938: 198–244), the third or Master Magician degree of Ordo Templi Orientis as revised by Aleister Crowley (King 1973: 85–100), and the third degree of Gerald Gardner’s (1884–1964) modern witchcraft movement, High Priest/High Priestess (Bogdan 2003: 229–33).

In Western esoteric thought the human being is often considered to consist of three parts: first, the physical or material body which is composed of the elements; second, the astral body which is often seen as connected to the spirit; and, third, the soul which is connected to the Godhead.⁶ The consequences of physical death can

6 It is evident from the “Ritual for the Donning of the Talar and the Cross” of the Order TS that the Solar Temple considered man to consist of body, soul, and spirit: “Vestal, go and cense our Brother(s) and Sister(s) Neophyte(s), making a circle around him/them 3 times in order to purify his/her/their bodies (physical–soul–spirit) and to protect him/her/them.”

be divided into two main theories. The first theory is based on annihilationalism in which the individual identity dissolves in death as the soul unites with the Godhead. Conversely, the other category is based on speculations concerning personal post-mortem existence. The post-mortem existence is usually understood as reincarnation of the soul and spirit in a new physical body of the material world, or as different speculations concerning life in the afterworld. As Gibbons has noted, “although the concept of reincarnation in western occultism has a Pythagorean provenance, since the nineteenth century it has been increasingly reformulated in terms of Eastern religious thought, most notably in the work of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–1891) and the Theosophical Society” (Gibbons 2001: 83). However, Blavatsky and her followers differed significantly from the Hindu and Buddhist views of reincarnation in that she regarded reincarnation as something positive, as a possibility of progressing spiritually in each incarnation. This positive attitude toward reincarnation was adopted by many other occultist societies and is today a standard feature of such large movements as the New Age movement. The positive outlook on reincarnation was not, however, limited to speculations and ideas concerning future incarnations; rather it was often popular to try to “remember” past incarnations. This practice seems to have been a recurrent feature in the Solar Temple, and Di Mambro revealed to a number of members their previous incarnations, which included Bernard de Clairvaux, Maat, Queen Hatshepsut, Manatanus, Ram (Melchisedech’s priest), and Akhenaton’s scribe (Palmer 1996: 309).

As already noted, ideas concerning personal post-mortem existence were not limited to reincarnation but also included more traditional Christian notions of life in hell, purgatory, and paradise. A development of this traditional view is the idea of a separate realm where the dead live. This idea became extremely popular through the spread of spiritualism from the 1850s on, in which the basic idea is that it is possible to interact with the dead through mediums. There were different speculations as to where this “realm of the dead” was located, but the most common one was that it was on a higher or more subtle plane of existence. The French spiritualist Allan Kardec (1804–69) claimed, however, that the dead lived on the other planets of our solar system. To what extent, if at all, Kardec’s ideas influenced Heaven’s Gate and the Solar Temple has not been properly investigated, but it is nonetheless important to note that these ideas were not unheard of in the esoteric milieu.

Among the esotericists who did not adhere to annihilationalism (the latter have always been in minority) it is evident that the way in which we live our lives and our spiritual level are directly linked to the afterlife. Furthermore, the afterlife was often seen as a state which was not conditioned by the gross matter of our bodies, but rather as a state suitable for the spirit and soul. Or to put it into the words of Gibbons:

In contrast to orthodox thinkers, the occultists tended to neglect the beautiful vision in their discourse on the afterlife, being preoccupied with the idea of a somatic immortality. They emphasised that postmortem embodiment would be purely spiritual, but they were equally emphatic that it would be *embodiment*, and they went into detail as to its nature.

The occult mystical representation of the spiritual body clearly represents a yearning to be released from an existence that was conditioned and contingent. The mystic wanted to return to a reality that transcends our mundane experience, but he wanted to return *in person*. (2001: 87)

To the members of the Solar Temple death was seen as a “transition,” something that Joseph Di Mambro had most likely picked up from his time in AMORC. AMORC was founded by H. Spencer Lewis (1883–1939) in 1915 and quickly became the largest Rosicrucian group in the world. According to one source from 2001, AMORC might have as many as around 250,000 members (Barrett 2001: 357). The teachings of the organization are highly eclectic, with a firm foundation in occultist spirituality. Death is seen as a transition in which the physical body (which is subject to change and decay) becomes separated from the soul. According to H. Spencer Lewis, “the soul of man, or the divine essence which animates him is the only part of man which is not subject to the law of change” (Lewis 1941: 238). The soul is thus eternal and not limited by the mere death of the physical body. In a letter from 1938 Lewis explains his beliefs concerning death:

To me the change called “death”, and which is better understood as transition, is merely a change from one form of physical, material and psychological existence to another. I believe the change is identical in importance and consequence to that change which takes place when the embryo of a newly born child takes its first breath and becomes a living entity on this earth plane. I do not attempt to say how, or what form or type of existence the individuality, personality, character or mentality of a human being may be like after this so-called transition, but of one thing I am convinced, and that is that this transition which we call “death” does not end the whole of our existence nor affect our existence except in its mode of physical, mental, spiritual and psychological expression. Consequently I have no fear of death except that I would not like to have it occur suddenly before I could prepare papers and other matters that would concern myself or my family after my inability to function any further here in this particular form. (H. Spencer Lewis to August H. Wagner, 31 January 1938⁷)

It would appear that Di Mambro and Jouret shared Lewis’s dislike of having the transition occur before all the paperwork was prepared: prior to enacting the transition the motives of their actions were carefully laid out in detail in the so-called Testaments and mailed to a number scholars and the media.

The Initiatory System of the Solar Temple

A common characteristic of many new religious movements is that their organizational structure is in a state of more or less constant change, and in that respect the Order of the Solar Temple was no exception. Introvigne has described the various layers of the organization as a ‘Chinese box’ system (Introvigne 1995: 274). The outer

7 In the author’s collection.

shell consisted (at least for a period) of the semi-public Amenta Club (which later changed its name to Atlanta) in which Luc Jouret lectured on New Age topics such as homeopathy, naturopathy, and ecology. This outer shell worked as a recruiting ground for members to the inner and semi-secret Archedia Clubs which were established in 1984 (see Chapter 1, this volume). According to Introvigne, in this layer of the organization one could “find a definite ritual and an actual initiation ceremony, with a set of symbols taken from the Masonic-Templar efforts of Jacques Breyer” (1995: 274). The third and central layer of the organization, to which only the most trusted members of the Archedia Clubs were invited, was the secret International Order of Chivalry Solar Tradition (founded in 1984), which later changed its name to the Order of the Solar Temple. To further complicate matters, a fourth organization existed: the Golden Way Foundation (previously called La Pyramide), which had been founded by Di Mambro, served as the parent organization of the Amenta and Archedia Clubs. The order was most successful in French-speaking countries but tried, unsuccessfully, to establish itself in the English-speaking world, particularly in the USA and Australia. In the English world the order was known by at least two names: the Order TS and the *Hermetica Fraternitas Templi Universali*. Compared to other Rosicrucian and Templar organizations the Solar Temple was a comparatively small organization. At the height of the order in 1989 it had a total of 442 members: 90 in Switzerland, 187 in France, 53 in Martinique, 16 in the USA, 86 in Canada, and 10 in Spain (Mayer 1996: 54).

The Order of the Solar Temple was organized in the fashion of a Masonic initiatory society with a strict hierarchy divided into different degrees. As in Craft Freemasonry, the Solar Temple had three degrees: *Frères du Parvis*, *Chevaliers de l'Alliance*, and *Frères des Temps Anciens* (Brothers of the Court, Knights of the Alliance, and Brothers of the Former Times). It is unclear whether or not these three degrees make up the Solar Temple, or if they constitute an even more secret and inner group. At least one source suggests that by 1990 the Rule of the Solar Temple “described an order under the absolute authority of a secret inner group called the Synarchy of the Temple,” which consisted of the above three degrees (Hall and Schuyler 1997: 294). In order to attain these degrees, members had to undergo a rite of initiation for each degree. The number and titles of the officiants in the rituals of initiation vary in the different rituals and it is thus impossible to give a clear picture of how the local “sanctuaries” were organized. In the “The Dubbing of a Knight” ritual of the Order TS the following officiants are mentioned: Priest, Deacon, Ritual Master, Matre, Chaplain, Sentinel, Master of Ceremonies, Guardian, and Escorts.

The Rituals of the Solar Temple

The practice of rituals appears to have been the core activity of the Solar Temple. These rituals seem to have been highly elaborate and suggestive, and the experience of the rituals was often enhanced by the use of operatic music and visual effects, and possibly by hallucinogenic drugs (Palmer 1996: 306). The visual effects included

lightning effects through which apparitions of the Masters appeared, and objects such as the Holy Grail materialized (Mayer 1999: 217). The rituals of the Solar Temple can be divided into two categories: magical/mystical rituals and rituals of initiation. The first category allegedly included sex magic practices (Introvigne 1995: 276) in which couples practiced “sperm drinking” (Palmer 1996: 311). The extent to which such practices actually occurred is, however, unclear. According to Susan J. Palmer, the Solar Temple constructed “special underground sanctuaries which were concealed behind false walls and reached by secret passages, requiring the ritual descent of 22 steps (Palmer 1996: 311). It is not stated to what the 22 steps refer, but given the esoteric context they probably allude to the 22 paths on the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.

An unpublished ritual entitled “Ceremony of the 4 Elements,” which was issued by *Hermetica Fraternitas Templi Universali*, gives a clear picture of the types of rituals that were practiced by the Solar Temple. This ritual is a full-moon meditation which brings together several Cenacles (local bodies) and “provides an opportunity to focalize cosmic energies and attract them to nourish the Egregore of the Temple and permit the realization of the Great Work.” The meditation is directed by a Magister of the Cenacle, who for that occasion is called the Magister Officiant, and all members of the order from the grade of Brothers of the Parvis are invited. Every aspect of the ritual is regulated in detail, from how the objects in the meeting room should be placed, who should say what, where the members should sit and how they should move, to how loud the music should be played (“never too loud”). It is further stated that the Collegium (each page of the document has the text “Exclusive property of the Collegium” at the bottom) requests with firmness and vigor that the instructions are followed to the letter, and that “Personal improvisations or modifications even if well meaning, will not be tolerated for this ceremony or any other.” The ritual begins with the Magister instructing the members to relax, after which he guides them through a solar visualization:

Fratres and Sorores, together, let us imagine a shower of golden white particles ... of which the source emanating from the Father is a Luminous Centre of Power, of Energy and of Consciousness situated above us. It descends on us ... in us ... At each expiration it dissolves everything which is crystalized and negative in us. It descends with these impurities into the earth ... to be transformed—all that is impure ... heavy ... superfluous.

The instructions for the visualization continue with how the shower of white particles descends from the universe and passes through the head, through the body and penetrates every texture of the tissues, and then pushes downwards, filled with the impurities of the body to the abyss of the earth to be digested. The object of this visualization is purification and regeneration “on all levels.” After the visualization the Magister Officiant reads a few paragraphs in which it emerges that the Solar Energies are also called the Christ Light, and that this light or energy is considered to purify the members of the Solar Temple and assist them to “participate in the evolutionary movement of Kingdoms and Beings from Darkness to Light.” After 60

seconds of music, the Master of Ceremonies lights four colored candles which refer to the four elements: blue candle for earth, yellow candle for air, green candle for water, and red candle for fire. When each candle is lit, an officiant reads a short text in which the qualities of the element are described. The text for the fire element is especially evocative:

Wild flames/that dance on human hearths,/from the victims of convention,/your Fire you hide.
 Yet a redemptive glory/of Light and of Love/attracts to its bosom/the revealed Christ-bearer,/who shall be consumed in the Grail/in the purple forces of Agni.
 Crowning the portal,/the North,/like an incandescent volcano,/in a blazing furnace/breathes into Life,/Universal Womb of the Worlds,/the Fire of the Spirit,/Immanent Light of the Father.
 And by Divine Marriage,/through the Power of perpetual movement,/rubified Alchemy/remounts in the South./Magical Gold of a crimson diamond,/forged in the Athanor of the flaming Sword,/densifying its Pure Essence/from the Unity of All,/Melts into the Glowing Life of Immortality.

Following some music the Magister Officiant tells the members that the power of the four elements enters the Oratory from the four cardinal points and blooms in the middle, and he continues with a short prayer in which, among other things, he asks the Lord that they “become a clear channel for Thy Will and the humble servant of Thine Action.” After some additional music the ritual closes with the words “I return the profane light to the profane world, so that the true Light may shine forever in our hearts.” According to the document, this ritual should be performed once a month at the full moon and it probably gives a good picture of the type of ritual practiced by the members of the Solar Temple.

The rituals of initiation of the Solar Temple can be described as typical neo-Templar Masonic rituals which incorporate symbols and concepts from alchemy, Rosicrucianism, and New Age. Surprisingly little has been published about the Solar Temple rituals of initiation, the only exception being a short description of a videotaped ritual (Hall and Schuyler 1997: 295). The rituals of initiation were secret and it is stated that “The text of this Ceremony remains the sole property of the Collegium which retains the right to request its immediate restitution at any moment without any explanation. It is understood that no copy of any kind shall be made. All officers must promise this on their honour.”

The so-called “Reception Ceremony” of the *Hermetica Fraternitas Templi Universali* constitutes the “Official Entry” or the initiation into the first degree (*Templi Noviciae*). As in all the other rituals of initiation of the Solar Temple that I have been able to examine, the ritual is written not for just one candidate but rather for a group of candidates. The candidates (referred to as aspirants in the document) are instructed to wear navy-blue suits for men and off-white clothing for women, and are told to shower before arriving. Before the rite begins the candidates are given a copy of the oath they are about to take so that they can familiarize themselves with it and meditate on it. This practice is not common in most Masonic initiatory

societies in which the oath is not divulged prior to actually taking it. The ritual objects include a table or an altar with a large white tablecloth, a Prie-Dieu or red cushion, a Templar cross, a sword, a red rose in a vase, a three-branch candelabrum with white candles, a Bible open at the Gospel of St John (or other sacred book requested by the postulant), a red votive candle, matches, incense, and the crosses to be given out to the new members.

A total of six officiants are required for the ritual, and its opening is very simple compared to other Masonic rituals. It consists of playing the “Toccatà” by Bach, lighting the votive candle, and then ushering in the assembly. The chief officiant then lights the three candles of the candelabrum and the incense, says a few words of opening, and then calls all to prayer. After the prayer he explains the purpose of the ritual (namely to receive new members), and then instructs the members to meditate on the importance of the act the aspirants are about to perform. The candidates are then brought into the room while the recorder plays a Gregorian chant. The chief officiant welcomes them and asks them if they are still determined to continue, to which the candidates should answer one by one. The candidates are then seated and the chief officiant informs them that the taking of the oath “reaches beyond human limitation,” and that they should remember that, from now on, their whole life will be dedicated to the “Path of Service, of Light, and Unity.” He further declares that “at this instant, with the help of the Egregore of the Temple and with the benediction of the Cosmic Masters, your field of consciousness will broaden and your scale of values will change, giving the full significance to the notions of Honour, Loyalty, Courage, Disciple and Effort.” The main concern of the candidates should from now on be “to preserve and respect the Consciousness of Life, to maintain Harmony and radiate Love,” and “to develop and intensify the Christ Light in the service of the Law.” Then either the Chancellor or Vigia (the latter office appears to be restricted to female members) proceeds to instruct the candidates in the meaning of the symbols of the degree, which include the Templar cross, the sword, the red rose, the three-branched candelabrum, the Bible, the red votive candle, the incense, the Talar, the cloak, and the Beauceant. The symbolism of the red votive candle is worth noting:

THE RED VOTIVE CANDLE: Divine Presence in the midst of men, reminds us that the Fire of the Spirit abides in the heart of each atom of matter. Symbol of Purification, Illumination and Love, it is the likeness of Spirit and Transcendence.

The candidates in turn approach the altar, kneel on their right knee, place their right hand on the sacred book, read the oath aloud, and then sign it. The chief officiant then formally declares that the aspirants have reached the degree of *Templi Noviciae* and gives them a cross as a visible token of their degree. The cross is the “Sacred Emblem of our Venerated Order, is its symbol and guarantor.” It is further explained that the cross has been blessed by an “Official Priest” during a special ceremony, and that the members should wear it at all meetings. This part of the ritual ends with the congregation reciting the “Templar Psalm”:

NON NOBIS DOMINE NON NOBIS
SED NOMINI TUO DA GLORIAM (three times)
 NOT FOR US, LORD, NOT FOR US
 BUT TO THY NAME GIVE GLORY.

This psalm is to be found in all the Solar Temple rituals of initiation that I have examined. After the chief officiant has extinguished the flames of the candelabrum and votive candle, he declares his work to have come to its end and with the recorder playing Hallelujah “fairly loud,” everybody except the Master of Ceremonies and the Guardian leaves the room. The “Reception Ceremony” of *Hermetica Fraternitas Templi Universali* is a surprisingly simple ritual, and its two most important parts are the instruction in the meaning of the symbols of the degree, and the taking of the oath. Unfortunately, the oath is omitted in the document, but in a ritual entitled “The Dubbing of a Knight” of the Order TS an oath of the order is printed in full, giving us a picture of the nature of the oaths taken in the Solar Temple:

THE OATH OF THE KNIGHT OF THE COVENANT
 (Knight of the White Cloak)

I swear here and now a solemn oath to nobly serve the cause of the Temple, in a spirit of detachment and humility.

I shall strive in all circumstances to maintain a worthy and just attitude, not only with regard to my co-disciples, but also whenever I represent our Venerable Order in the world.

I promise to respect the sacred rules of the Temple which rule our Venerable Order, to live them permanently in accordance with the Ethic which constitutes its force and to obey the directives of my Superiors without reserve.

I commit my self to respect and conform to the customs and laws of the countries in which I might be called to serve.

“The Dubbing of a Knight” is not an admission ritual into the Solar Temple (or the Order TS) but a higher degree, possibly for the second degree. It is clearly stated in the document that a knight can only be dubbed by the Grand Master (that is Di Mambro himself), the Deputy Grand Master, or by “a Dignitary specially appointed by the High Authorities of the Order.” It is further stated that the candidates to be knighted must observe a complete fast during the day of the ceremony, and follow a light diet without meat for three days before the ceremony. The candidates wait from two to three hours in an antechamber, during which they are supposed to meditate and familiarize themselves with the oath of the Knight before they are admitted into the temple. The ritual is markedly Catholic in nature and includes a mass which is performed simultaneously—described as a shortened form of

the Holy Eucharist, and it begins with a priest who asperges himself, the altar, the sanctuary, and the assembly while saying the following prayer:

In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
 May the Lord purify me that I may worthily perform his service.
 In the Strength of the Lord do I repel all evil from His Holy Altar and Sanctuary,
 And from this House, wherein we worship Him;
 and I pray our Heavenly Father that He will send His holy Angel to build for us
 a spiritual Temple through which his strength and blessing may be poured upon
 His people. Through Christ our Lord.

The Escorts then go to the antechamber and blindfold the candidates and then lead them into the temple, facing the altar in the east. The lights are switched off, and for a moment everything is in total darkness and silence. At the sound of a gong the Escorts remove the blindfolds and music is turned on (for example, *Don Carlos*), and colored spotlights are slowly turned on. The seven-branched candelabrum is lit and gradually the whole temple is illuminated. After a brief explanation by the Ritual Master of why the group has gathered, the priest blesses the candidates and then continues with the Eucharist in a low voice while the rite continues. Some of the basic principles of the order are then explained to the candidates in turn by the Matre, the Chaplain, the Sentinel, and the Ritual Master. It is explained that the members of the order are the Knights of the Temple: “We are the survivors, the Incarnated Ones from the Heavens, the new Templars.” It is further explained that they are, among other things, Guardians of the Holy Grail and that their commitment carries a “solemn importance both for [their] own future as well as the future of the entire planet.” This apparently involves a new “State of Consciousness,” which implies a new comprehension of existence, where “spirit and matter are one.”

After the oath has been taken, the Ritual Master informs the new knights that they have progressed spiritually and that they have been watched over by the “Masters” and that, if they are worthy, they might encounter the “Hidden Ones.” The priest then gives each candidate the communion, and then the “most solemn moment” of the ritual takes place: they are dressed in the White Cloak. Following this, the candidates are ordered one by one to advance to the prie-dieu and kneel on their right knee. The Ritual Master then dubs them by touching on the right shoulder, on the left shoulder, then on the head, reciting: “By virtue of the powers vested in me by the function that I exercise in this Lodge, I now promote you to the rank of a Knight.” The candidates are then invited to take their place in the Circle of Knights, and after some additional instructions by the Ritual Master the ritual ends after the so-called Grail Song has been sung.

Just like the “Reception Ceremony,” the “The Dubbing of a Knight” is a comparatively plain ritual and the teachings conveyed are simple by nature, especially if compared to the “Ritual for the Donning of the Talar and the Cross” of the Order TS. This has also survived in a slightly shorter version, called the “Traditional Ritual for the Donning of the Talar” of the *Hermetica Fraternitas Templi Universi*. The

central part of the ritual consists of the candidate (with his or her head covered in a black veil) being led round the temple, and at each cardinal point being instructed by a different officiant in the teachings of the order. At each station is a colored candle which corresponds to one of the four elements, just as in the “Ceremony of the 4 Elements.” Given the Solar Temple’s fiery end, the Watcher’s instructions at the north station, which correspond to the fire element, are particularly ominous:

Death is the same for us all.
It is how we leave Life that makes the difference.

But always remember
that Death is an illusion.
In fact,
It is only another aspect of Life.

At this Station, let me tell you
that you must also consider Life
as ephemeral as smoke passing by,
or a cloud drifting overhead,
and all its glory
is like a flower in the meadow
which unfolds in the morning and dies at eventide.

In the world of illusions,
all must pass away.

Everyone must one day confront
The great problem of Death
which alone gives meaning to Life.
You must be able to die to the profane world
in order to be born again to the Cosmic World.

Therefore, let the quality and the wholeness of Life
compensate for its shortness.
You, wishing to be a Knight of the Temple,
Do not think of living according to Cosmic Good.
And since nothing is more uncertain
than the hour of Death ...
prepare yourself each day to be FREE
to leave this Earth
and to continue
on a parallel Invisible plane,
free from all human and terrestrial chains
which keeps you prisoner of yourself.

The other significant part of the ritual is the purification of the candidate, which culminates in the donning of the Talar or white robe. Following a short prayer by the Chaplain, the Master of Ritual conducts the purification in which he says, among other things: “increase your efforts to purify yourself, to purify yourself always and forever, not through mortifications, deprivations and imposed penance ... For it is not your body, but your Soul and Heart that must be purified.” It is explained that the Talar symbolizes purity, unity, force, and “the choice of Light and Knowledge,” and that it is consecrated by the Spiritual Masters, the latter described as “intermediary between God and us.” Before the actual donning, the candidate takes an oath (which unfortunately is not included in the document), and is then asked to take off their clothes, leaving only their underwear, while saying:

[T]he moment has come for you
to purify yourself/selves, casting off
all impurities, all habits and
all the human conditions
which keep you prisoner
of the material world.
Symbolically, rid yourself of these
by taking off your worldly clothes.

As the candidate dons the Talar, the ritual draws to a close, but prior to this the Master of Ritual urges the candidate to:

always remain worthy
of wearing this Sacred Robe
whatever may happen,
even if your physical life is in danger,
for you will soon learn
that physical life is of no importance.

By October 1994, it would become clear that this was not to be interpreted metaphorically, but literally.

Concluding Remark: The “Transit” as Initiation

As a rule, scholars who have attempted to explain the suicides and homicides of the Solar Temple have focused on the two leaders of the movement, Joseph Di Mambro and Luc Jouret. For instance, Lewis explains that he focused on “the founder of the OTS because his idiosyncrasies provide keys for understanding the Solar Temple’s final ‘transit’” (Lewis 2005: 313). The role of the leaders of a “suicide cult” is undoubtedly particularly important in trying to understand the motivating factors for such extreme groups as Heaven’s Gate, the People’s Temple, and the Solar Temple, but at the same time such a focus runs the risk of avoiding the question of what motivated the members to follow their leaders in death. Strategies of authority

notwithstanding, suicide must appear as a plausible option for the members in order for them to carry out such a drastic action. In the case of the Solar Temple, I would argue that a close reading of the rituals of initiation and the esoteric context of the movement can afford us with at least a partial key to understanding why the members (or at least some of them) chose to join the transit. Through the rituals it is possible to understand the symbolical universe of the members and thus to place the transit within a frame of reference.

In common with rituals of many other Masonic initiatory societies, a recurrent theme in the rituals of the Solar Temple is the notion of purification. As demonstrated by the “Ritual for the Donning of the Talar and the Cross,” it is not the body which needs to be purified, but rather the “soul and heart.” This spiritual purification is a common feature in Western esotericism, particularly in spiritual alchemy which sees the alchemical process as a transmutation leading from “lead to gold,” from unenlightened to enlightened. In a ritual entitled “Passage of the Surplice” of the Order TS the candidate is ritually purified through a symbolic crucifixion:

My Brother/s, nothing happens by chance, everything is acquired by effort, consciousness and trials. Thus before reaching this new level, you have to pass through the Cross and the Labyrinth of Transmutation. As a sign of self-sacrifice, and with deep humility, lie down with your face resting on the ground, with your arms extended in the form of a cross; lie down as did our Brothers of the Ancient Times.

The candidate is then guided in a meditation which takes him through the “7 Halls of Wisdom” in which he banishes in turn Pride; Envy, Covetousness and Jealousy; Avarice; Greed; Sloth and Disorder; Anger and Maliciousness; and finally, in the seventh hall, Lust. The identification of a symbolic crucifixion with spiritual purification is important as it highlights the fact that death was interpreted as an initiation among the members of the Solar Temple. This identification of death with initiation is stressed a number of times in the rituals, for instance in the “Ritual for the Donning of the Talar and the Cross,” where it is said that “You must be able to die to the profane world in order to be born again to the Cosmic World.” Statements like this are not uncommon in religious literature in general, but they would usually be interpreted in a metaphorical way as alluding to the fact that the spiritual seeker should not be constrained by the values of profane society but instead focus on his inner self. In the Solar Temple, however, the notion of transmutation and death to the profane world went beyond a mere metaphorical interpretation:

The Testament claimed that what the OTS was about to do was not suicide, but something radically different. The Templars—as explained in more detail in three videos sent to a French Templar together with the written documents—through the force of the Blue Star (connected to Sirius) were expected to reach Jupiter where they could eventually become secret Masters themselves. (Introvigne 2000: 156)

As an esoteric Masonic initiatory society the Solar Temple is an extreme and unparalleled case in which the practice of initiation took a bizarre turn. The transit became the ultimate ritual of initiation which marked the passage from the profane world to the spiritually pure world of another planet. Through death the members were initiated into disincarnate Masters and thus became the link between the world of men and God.

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Chapter 9

The Ordre du Temple Solaire and the Quest for the Absolute Sun

Marc Labelle

In many contemporary religious movements, the nuclear menace—including an understanding of its impact and eschatological ramifications—is a recurrent preoccupation. This paper analyzes the compensatory thrust towards sacredness, and examines its modes inside the Ordre du Temple solaire (Order of the Solar Temple, or OTS), whose ideology was firmly rooted in its will to escape nuclear and ecological disaster. The focus will be on the function of the Absolute in the transformation of the human species as viewed by the order.

The Trialectics of Master–Mediator–Member

The hermeneutics of the Romanian philosopher Mircea Eliade (1907–86) are helpful in establishing a pertinent line of analysis. His general approach is phenomenological, and he used the term *hierophany* to define the manifestation of the sacred through different modes, such as locations, plants, objects, forms, rites, myths, symbols, animals, human beings. The hierophanic process is constituted by three elements: a) the object or physical being; b) the invisible force and c) the mediator, or the sacred object or being. For example, the tree Yggdrasil, Jacob's ladder, the Golgotha mount, and the consumption of the Vedic beverage *soma* transforming the officiant into a cosmic giant all have in common the function of elevating one to heaven. In the case of the OTS, the “transit” of the chosen members towards Sirius via Jupiter by the pseudo-alchemical method of “calcination,” whose power of representation is evaluated in this paper, plays this role. The mediator is separated from the profane world, with its spatial and temporal limits, in order to rejoin the source, the “divine.”

On the collective level, the dialectic of sacred/profane is translated into the Cosmos/Chaos duality. Space is not homogenous: it is discontinuous and oriented around a fixed point or central axis, the Axis Mundi or World Center. Likewise, primordial time (*ab origine, ab initio, in principio, or in illo tempore*) is reactualized by rites in temples (*templum-tempus*) or other sacred places representing the cosmic pillar (*universalis columna*). Sacred time is reversible or circular because the perfection of its beginnings is linked in a complementary manner to the eschatological dissolution of the profane world. Thus, rebirth in the eternal present can be accomplished in

any sacred time or place. This is the reason why the 33 Sages of the Rosicrucians (33 Sages or Frères aînés de la Rose+Croix)—“these carriers of the original fire”¹ from the astral dimension, venerated by the followers of the order—were dwelling in an underground city in Zurich (Switzerland). This reference group’s mission was to regenerate humanity by alchemical means.

Since Eliade’s ultimate perspective is theological, Régis Debray’s “atheological” perspective offers a compensatory solution. However, in order to avoid the excessive materiality of Debray’s mediology (*médiologie*), which gives primacy to the instruments of transmission, Freud’s psychoanalysis and the philosophy of Manuel de Diéguez, who presents himself as a “mystical atheist,” will be resorted to, along with other thinkers.

Representation Aids

As we have already learned, the Solar Temple was led by a trio of very different personalities: Joseph Di Mambro,² Luc Jouret,³ and Michel Tabachnik (1942–).⁴ The eclecticism of the order is obvious: it proclaimed that it belonged to the Templar tradition, but also to gnosticism and esotericism, while picking up on the most popular themes of the New Age. However, the primordial theme of fire or light led the order’s destiny. The fiery ritual massacres performed by the order were rooted in the medieval tradition of the stake,⁵ the “purification” altar of the human soul.

The order owned a great deal of real estate—some 80 houses or estates—throughout the world: in Switzerland, metropolitan France, Martinique, Canada, Monaco, and Australia. Of particular importance was the organic Sacré-Cœur farm in Sainte-Anne-de-la-Pérade (Quebec), which was considered a refuge of the elect

1 Videocassette *Joseph d’Arimathie—message*, internal OTS document watched by its most faithful followers just prior to the 1994 slaughters; cited in Jean-Marie Abgrall, *Les sectes de l’Apocalypse*, p. 207. All passages from the French documents cited here are my translation.

2 Originally a jeweler, Di Mambro participated in the Rosicrucian movement for a long time before creating his own organizations, including La Pyramide and the Golden Way Foundation. Notwithstanding, many exoteric organizations (Archedia Clubs, for example) centered on health issues and personal development, which served as a cover for the recruitment of future members of the Solar Temple. Although physically unattractive, Di Mambro was nonetheless an outstanding organizer.

3 Holder of a PhD diploma, the homeopathic doctor was moreover cultured, brilliant, a socialite, a smooth talker, flattering, attractive, and charismatic. In short, he had all the qualities of the perfect recruiting agent.

4 Tabachnik was a well-known orchestral conductor, and created a musical language called Sirius. He was president of the Golden Way Foundation from 1981 to its dissolution in 1990.

5 In France, the original Order of the Knights Templar was abolished by King Philip IV. In 1314, Grand Master Jacques de Molay was condemned to the stake along with, according to tradition, 53 Templars.

for when the Apocalypse came as it was equipped with a nuclear bunker. A villa in Vacluse (France) also hid an atomic fallout shelter. In addition, the order's houses were provided with a sanctuary, usually underground.

The following is the entry formula of the initiatic ceremony pertaining to the first degree in the order's hierarchy, called the Frères du Parvis:

I swear to respect *the absolute secret because of its sacredness* for myself and our revered Order. Aware that *an immortal and cosmic order* governs all life in the universe, I commit myself to respect the hierarchy of the Temple. This oath is binding towards humanity, but first and foremost towards myself and the divine.⁶

Di Mambro magically opened the doors of the holy rooms where rituals were conducted with a remote control hidden under his cape. During nightly group performances, special effects such as electrified swords producing flashes were used to create an impressive *son et lumière*, and not only objects such as the Holy Grail, but also personages such as Christ, materialized.⁷ A voice was heard giving orders. The assembly would witness Di Mambro's communications with beings from the beyond. Such performances were repeated whenever the leader perceived a decline in the group's fervor.

An elaborate array of communication instruments—material or virtual—was put in place to disseminate the order's views and actions. According to Di Mambro, the invisible Masters from the Superior Lodge of Zurich (Loge mère de Zurich) had the most advanced spectrographs, which had the capacity to register a person's energy waves at long distance, to assess the state of their aura or current vibratory field. For over \$60,000 apiece, Di Mambro purchased sophisticated machines in the United States that produced holograms: great figures or uncommon ones, such as patriarchs dressed in white. Contact with the underground Masters (in Zurich) and cosmic Masters (on the planet Proxima) energized the organization's operational axis.

As we know, the 1994 murder-suicides of OTS members took place at three locations: Morin Heights in Quebec on 30 September and 4 October (5 deceased), Cheiry (23 victims) and Granges-sur-Salvan (25 deaths) in Switzerland from 3 to 5 October.⁸ These 53 deaths were interpreted as follows by their authors: "Fully conscious and without fanaticism, we have planned our transit, which is not a suicide

6 Arnaud Bédât, Gilles Bouleau and Bernard Nicolas, *L'Ordre du Temple solaire. Les secrets d'une manipulation*. Paris: 2000, p. 132 (my italics).

7 The symbol of the Grail, stemming from the Celtic tradition, has been taken over by Christian mythology, which has made it the sacred vessel used by Joseph of Arimathea to collect Jesus Christ's blood at the crucifixion. In one of the order's dwellings in Quebec, apparitions of Grand Master Jacques de Molay were preceded by many days of fasting and meditation. Some figures that materialized were 3 m tall.

8 In Cheiry, most bodies were found in the sanctuary, wearing ceremonial capes. It is noteworthy that the total number of deaths is 53; Thierry Huguenin, who was supposed to be the 54th victim, narrowly escaped death because of his intuition.

in the human meaning of the word.”⁹ The mass media, and also the law and the government, were nonetheless accused of having “forced [them] to leave this earth prematurely.”¹⁰

The next episode had been announced in 1994: “From the Levels where we are now operating and by a sound law of magnetization, we will be able to recall the last Servants capable of hearing this final message.”¹¹ A new massacre effectively occurred during the night of 15–16 December 1995, near Saint-Pierre-de-Chérennes in Isère, France.¹² In a doline, the constabulary discovered a star; each of the 14 branches was a corpse (16 deaths in all). A cocktail of drugs had softened the passage to the star Sirius and its planet Proxima, supposedly inhabited by the Supreme Masters. The leader of the rite of passage, psychotherapist Christiane Bonet, a medium since October 1994, wrote: “On the other side of the veil, death is an illusion.”¹³

Imaginative Representation

Here follows a brief description of some of the major esoteric symbols of the Order of the Solar Temple.

The Templar forked *cross*, the instrument of Christ’s torture, became the spark of the Christlike light. The horizontal branch represents the material dimension and the vertical branch the spiritual dimension.

As a symbol of total purification, *fire* was used to burn down the centers of the order and burn the followers to a cinder. *Les Cahiers de Sarah* present fire as an eschatological savior:¹⁴ “In the Hindu Tradition we learn that the primeval avatar of the Adamic Cycle is AGNI, the FIRE, and He will return at the end of the Cycle to purify and revive the terrestrial realm.”

The *bicephalous eagle*, surmounted by a crown with the letters T and S interlaced inside the letter O, symbolizes the mastery of the dual human mind’s operation, or the superior vision, since legend claims that the eagle is the only animal capable of staring at the sun.

According to the oral traditions of Kabbala, the *Ark of the Covenant* (Arche de l’Alliance) cannot be shown to the profane—the sacredness of the eagle is needed! Michel Tabachnik announced that the actual order was replaced by the Alliance

9 Testament—Ultime message, in Renaud Marhic, *L’Ordre du Temple solaire. Enquête sur les extrémistes de l’occulte—II*. Bordeaux: 1996, p. 232. Marhic’s book contains the “Testament” and the secret statutes of the OTS.

10 Testament—Aux épris de Justice, *ibid.*, p. 223.

11 Testament—Ultime message, *ibid.*, p. 233.

12 The last five deaths took place on 22 March 1997, in Saint-Casimir in Quebec.

13 Bédât et al., p. 225.

14 Published by the OTS (Toronto: Éditions Atlanta, 1986); cited in Jean-Marie Abgrall, *Les sectes de l’Apocalypse. Gourous de l’an 2000*. Paris: 1999, pp. 171–207 at p. 194.

Rose Croix (ARC), created in 1991.¹⁵ The new name was officially approved by Di Mambro on 24 September 1994: it meant the gradual abolition of all hierarchy—by the transit bringing the elect into the company of the Immortals on Proxima, that hypothetical planet of Sirius?

Sirius, located 8.6 light years away in the Canis Major constellation in the southern hemisphere and accompanied by a small star revolving around it, is the brightest star in the sky. This represents the philosophical formula “Sirius’s point of view,” to designate the global view of the transcendent One, in opposition to the fragmentary view of the multiple profane. The Solar Temple interpreted this formula literally.

Conceptual Representation

Here follows a brief description of some of the major concepts of the Order of the Solar Temple.

The elite of the *secret* order visited Ayers Rock (Uluru), the sacred place of the Aborigines located in the center of Australia. Called “the realm of the First Born,” it was identified with the Mountain of the Prophets, “holder of the Secret of Secrets.”¹⁶ According to Di Mambro, “humanity must rediscover the original knowledge lost with the advent of free will.”¹⁷

Messianism took many forms inside the order. Revealing a complex of self-deification, Jouret declared he was none other than the Lamb of God, that is the Savior. By comparison, one could say that Di Mambro reserved for himself the role of God the Father, or rather the role of Zeus-Pater (Jupiter), and that the “ethereal” Tabachnik evokes the Holy Ghost. Élisabeth Huneau, a young girl suffering from personality disorders, was left by her parents in Di Mambro’s care. He took her to Deir el-Bahari in Egypt to meditate together in the temple of Queen Hatshepsut, of whom Di Mambro said she was the *reincarnation*. He announced a revelation: Hatshepsut would give birth to a being as powerful as Christ. Hatshepsut was made pregnant by the god Manatanus ... of whom Di Mambro was—guess what?—the reincarnation. After this “divine” episode, all had to respect “a purity zone” of many meters around Hatshepsut, who was adorned with luxurious dresses and jewels.

15 Its exoteric name was Association de Recherches Culturelles, to be compared with the Académie de Recherche et de Connaissance des Hautes Sciences (ARCHS). Led by Luc Jouret and his devoted associates Hermann Delorme and Jean-Pierre Vinet, the ARC’s social goal was the training of managers on the spiritual level.

16 Testament—La Rose+Croix, Marhic, p. 224.

17 Jacques Guillon, “Tabachnik se présente comme un candide envoûté par Di Mambro,” AFP, 24 April 2001, accessed on the Tussier website: www.multimania.com/tussier/ots.htm (Sectes > Ordre du Temple solaire). This site contained articles from *Le Monde*, the AFP, and other sources, but has been superseded by www.prevensectes.com.

Joseph Di Mambro also claimed that his daughter Anne, nicknamed Nanou, was born¹⁸ by the power of his mind and the grace of *Immaculate Conception*:¹⁹ an invisible Master lowered a sword fitted with a secret bulb producing a beam of light on the throat of Dominique Bellaton, a lady friend of Di Mambro, in order to attest to the “cosmic procreation.” The cosmic child Nanou was in reality the natural daughter of Di Mambro and Bellaton. Other children were forbidden to approach the Immaculately Conceived. (Even the vegetables on her plate came from an off-limits garden patch.) All Solar Temple members were under her orders. She was renamed Emmanuelle in order to reaffirm her messianic role.²⁰

“Facing the general *degradation* of the human race, incapable of halting its destructive impulses, facing the increasing rise of environmental, climatic, chemical, *nuclear*,²¹ military perils ... and especially in the face of police intimidation ... everywhere we have strived to reveal the Mysteries of the Great Tradition, we have decided to withdraw from this world, in full lucidity and in the plenitude of our conscience.”²²

The *punishment* is collective: “We, the Lords of the Flame, Guardians of the sacred SHEKINAH,²³ we proclaim that a Power and Will superior to ours have seen that an irreversible disorder and chaos ruled over the Earth. Facing this acknowledgment, facing the persistent refusal of mankind, we have no other solution than a restart by GENERAL ANNIHILATION.”²⁴ Another Sodom and Gomorrah was forecast.²⁵ Was Jouret looking for the “lightning instant”? These Old Testament cities were destroyed by divine fire because their inhabitants “lived in sin”; only Lot and his daughters survived. The function of fire is to sacrifice, purify, regenerate, immortalize.²⁶

18 On 22 March 1982, at Hopstetten (Soleure canton) in Switzerland.

19 Catholic dogma proclaiming that the Virgin Mary was conceived and born free from original sin. It should be understood that this sin is sexual in the Christian unconscious.

20 The masculine form Emmanuel, meaning “God with us” in Hebrew, was Christ’s messianic name (Mt 1, 23). Di Mambro also declared that Nanou’s polarity was male, despite her female body.

21 My italics. Doses of iodine to be swallowed in the event of a nuclear explosion were added to the survival kits of the order, prepared according to Dr Jouret’s instructions. It was believed that the body could be purified, energized to face coming cataclysms, or transformed.

22 Testament—Aux épris de Justice, Marhic, pp. 222–3.

23 According to rabbinic literature, the Divine Presence or the Glory of God has disappeared with the destruction of the Temple, but will return with the Messiah.

24 Excerpt from an OTS text, “L’Homme de la Troisième Force” (November 1993), cited in Jean-François Mayer, “Les chevaliers de l’Apocalypse : l’Ordre du Temple Solaire et ses adeptes,” *Sectes et démocratie*, p. 222, note 25.

25 Cf. Testament—Transit pour le futur, Marhic, p. 230.

26 There is a reference to the myth of the Phoenix reborn from ashes in a text found at Salvan, “Le Retour du Feu”; excerpts cited in Mayer, “Les chevaliers de l’Apocalypse : l’Ordre du Temple Solaire et ses adeptes,” pp. 222–3.

The *fiery sacrifice*: “An alchemical cooking, that of the great human work moving forward by degree, requires its holocausts.”²⁷ Was the esotericist Jacques Breyer, the spiritual father of the order, pointing out what victims by using the term *holocaust*, that is, “entirely consumed by the flames” in accordance with the Jewish tradition. If his words were metaphorical, many of the elect chose a literal interpretation.

The fundamental goal is to grant one’s “Interior Being to take the place which was assigned to him since *Eternity*.”²⁸ Closely related to this goal, the order aspired to arouse in its members “the Spirit of an Eternal Knighthood.”²⁹ The Rosicrucians promised to those joining their ranks “the greatest of all gifts: *IMMORTALITY*.”³⁰

“The individual progressively discovers himself to be part of the Unique (= cosmic conscience).”³¹ “The human being is multiple in the form but remains ONE in Spirit, ONE in Essence.”³² The transit “was accomplished ... with the real-life knowledge of an exact science and in accordance with Matter’s and Spirit’s natural rules which are truly ONE.”³³ The container (the form) is multiple whilst the content (the meaning) is unique: unity is believed to be shrouded by appearances.

It’s a question of discovering the genuine supreme reality of “a Universal Order whose parameters do not belong to this world.”³⁴ “We are leaving this Earth to rediscover, in full lucidity and liberty, a Dimension of Truth and *Absolute*.”³⁵

The Desire for Renewal

These are the chivalrous qualities required to become part of the order: “an *absolute* discretion, loyalty and faithfulness” (my italics). The goal of the order included an “ecumenical” aspect: each follower had to commit himself to create “an authentic Fraternity amongst all members of the order and those of Fraternal Organizations to build the Celestial Jerusalem.”³⁶ However, the order met obstacles that would have prevented it from accomplishing its mission. The Testament³⁷ accuses a mixture of

27 Jacques Breyer, *Vaincre la seconde mort* (Paris: Éditions Ergonia, 1984), cited in Abgrall, p. 199.

28 Testament—Aux épris de Justice, Marhic, p. 223.

29 Ibid., p. 217.

30 Testament—La Rose+Croix, Marhic, p. 224. The typographical recourse to terms all in capitals to make concepts appear monumental is noteworthy. Also, the abuse of initial capitals in the original French aims to increase the prestige of the names.

31 Luc Jouret, *Évolution de la conscience*, duplicated lecture notes by Éditions Atlanta, cited in Mayer, “Les chevaliers de l’Apocalypse,” p. 212, note 15.

32 Testament—Transit pour le futur, Marhic, p. 229.

33 Ibid., p. 230.

34 Testament—Aux épris de Justice, Marhic, p. 223.

35 Testament—Transit pour le futur, Marhic, p. 230.

36 Article 33 of the order’s statutes for the citations in this paragraph, Marhic, p. 298.

37 Probably created by Jo Di Mambro, but with his wife’s help (like other major documents). The tone is extreme, rigid, Manichean, paranoiac, self-congratulatory, megalomaniac.

unofficial powers of having tried to “disorganize a structure of which some members, faithful servants of the Rosicrucians, had access to the Mysteries of the Grail in the sanctuaries of the last Secret Houses of the Rosicrucians, during the last cycle of awakening of the Temple.”³⁸

The Celestial Jerusalem being a long time coming on this overly corrupt earth, the Solar Temple’s elect apparently chose to beam up to the utopic planet Proxima to reach the center of the universe without further delay. The order’s elite aspired to escape from matter’s density but, being too heavy, they needed to shed their bodies in order to transit by the “relay-star” Sirius and join the Masters, these “entities of light, in the image of the risen Christ.”³⁹

As mentioned above, during the last meeting on 24 September 1994, before the mass deaths, the order was renamed the Alliance Rose Croix (ARC) so as to reach “the irreversible stage of the return to the Father”⁴⁰ and the Vth Reign, that of the Spirit, where hierarchies would be abolished.⁴¹ The herald completely dressed in black who announced that the ARC had succeeded the *Ordre du Temple solaire* was none other than Michel Tabachnik. He later claimed that this was only a metaphor. Nevertheless, the corpses at Cheiry formed an arc. Also, it should be noted that Tabachnik was the author of the *Archées*, alchemical texts used at the third degree of initiation.⁴² The *Archées*—a collection of 21 articles of 15–20 pages each, written between 1984 and 1989—are considered abstruse even by the followers of the order. These texts were part of the order’s teaching, and French judge Luc Fontaine concluded that it “had a dimension of absolute since it was supposed to be officially

38 Testament—Aux épris de Justice, Marhic, p. 221.

39 Acaccio Pereira, “L’OTS, une secte qui avait fait de la mort ‘le cœur de sa doctrine,’” *Le Monde*, 17 August 2000, www.multimania.com/tussier/ots.htm (see note 17).

40 Acaccio Pereira, “La nébuleuse de l’Ordre du Temple solaire,” *Le Monde*, 16 August 2000, and “Le procureur a requis cinq ans de prison contre Michel Tabachnik dans l’affaire de l’OTS,” *Le Monde*, 28 April 2001, *ibid.* This theme was not only included in the speech delivered by Michel Tabachnik during the meeting, but earlier in his writing was titled “Épiphanie 91”.

41 *Les Cahiers de Sarah* assert that “humanity can be classified into five categories: the mineral man, the vegetal man, the animal man, the human man and the divine man.” The Vth Reign is supposed to be “the logical outcome of the cosmic and human evolution.” Cited in Abgrall, p. 192, note 1, and p. 193.

42 It seems that the arc was a mascot symbol in Tabachnik’s life: in 1982 the conductor composed a work called the *Arch* (for soprano and orchestra) for the city of Geneva. The same year, the property management company ARCH, jointly run by his wife Sabine Reutter, bought a building at Le Barroux in the Vacluse, where Di Mambro and other members of the order were often seen. It came to be known at the end of 1996 that the Alliance Rose Croix (ARC) was installed at 41 Ramey Street, in the 18th district in Paris; Tabachnik’s Parisian pied-à-terre was located in the same building. Tabachnik’s fundamental values appear to be creativity and intellectual influence.

issued from the supreme initiated beings.”⁴³ Psychiatrist Jean-Marie Abgrall had testified in court as follows:

It was not possible [for the follower] to escape from a logic of dependence since all the teaching integrated and expounded an homogeneous theoretical corpus which had the effect of stripping the psychodynamic of suicides or murders of all critical connotations, integrating these crimes in a form of sacrificial acts, the notion of death being progressively divested of its agonizing dimension to become the objective sign of the success of the initiatory voyage.⁴⁴

Despite everything, the magistrate’s court of Grenoble decided that Tabachnik could not be sentenced on assumptions, and he was acquitted on 25 June 2001.

Whatever Tabachnik’s degree of responsibility, the followers of the order were seeking the metamorphosis of the vulgar or profane man into an initiate to achieve a divine state, such as that of lead being transformed into gold—a base metal into a noble metal. At first they had envisaged what one could call a “sublimation,” that is, a transport by flying saucer to Proxima. Later, an energetic transit by the alchemical test of calcination to reintegrate the primordial cosmic energy was favored. Jacques Breyer’s doctrine of “carbonization of bodies,” which claims that the power of fire is sufficient to prompt the energetic leap, was adopted literally by the order.⁴⁵ The fusion of the image and the concept took place in the overexcited minds of the cosmic elect. By burning their bodies, the pyromaniac superego has consumed its own support. Thus, contrary to expectations, the protection of the order’s sacred places against nuclear fire turned out to be ineffective.

An Unlimited Dilatation, or the Jupiter Complex

Why has the fate of the *Ordre du Temple solaire* been so tragic? The swindles are only a small part of the explanation. The spiritual adventure of the order—of Joseph Di Mambro, Luc Jouret, and Michel Tabachnik in particular—was rich in resources (especially in the communication department) but poor in critical thought. The sharing of an inauthentic knowledge was arbitrarily reserved for a few members, especially those who were rich and submissive. In correlation, the knowledge that remained secret acted as a magnet on the minds of other members. The liberty of the followers, and above all that of their children, was wolfed down by the “socio-spiritual” ambition of the order’s leaders. They liked to think of themselves as the privileged spokespersons of an authority from the beyond. To top it all, two members wanted

43 Acaccio Pereira, “La nébuleuse de l’Ordre du Temple solaire,” *Le Monde*, 16 August 2000, Tussier website (see note 17).

44 *Ibid.*

45 Towards 1976–77, in La Pyramide community gathered around Di Mambro, there was already talk of “the mutation of the Adamic man into a Cosmic man by way of the alchemical fire” (Marc Pivois, “‘Tabachnik a donné le signal’ du grand départ,” *Libération*, 28 April 2001, Tussier website [see note 17]).

to fight death by death: Jo Di Mambro had developed cancer the previous year and his wife Jocelyne had been weakened by breast cancer for many years. However, the fall was a shared responsibility. Here is the cut-and-dried testimony of former Solar Temple member Hermann Delorme:

No one had pointed a gun at my head to make me join the Order I could easily cry out that the people of the order had manipulated me, enslaved me, brainwashed me, indoctrinated me. There is some truth in that assertion. The rest of the truth, the biggest part, is my responsibility.⁴⁶

Another OTS ex-follower (and survivor of the murder-suicides), Thierry Huguenin, was convinced that “the Masters [moved] in mysterious ways.”⁴⁷ The pursuit of superior goals justified resorting to special effects or illusions; even when their secret was discovered, the belief of many followers remained intact. Automanipulation is one side of mental manipulation. This is the *syndrome of the shepherd*:⁴⁸ the crossing of immoderate aspirations between leaders and their followers produces an osmosis of megalomaniac willpowers.

The naïve dilatation of the New Age eclecticism, on the horizontal, was centered on the superficial appropriation of the Templar tradition, on the vertical. The expansion of an ego with a narcissistic immanence toward total reality found its stake in the class of the supreme Masters: “The absolute on the ordinate creates fullness on the abscissa.”⁴⁹ Reiterated pan-psychic communication between the two swelled to deadly paranoia because the average ego of the follower trapped itself in the infinite mutual reflection of the mirrors of a captive message.

If Freudian psychoanalysis defines secondary narcissism as the investment of the psychic drive targeting the ego as “a system of *linking* representations between themselves,”⁵⁰ in my opinion, tertiary narcissism consists in a systemic closure absorbing any phenomenon by making it serve as a foil to the ego bewitched by itself: that is, imprisoned in the infinite lock of a knowledge transformed in an incantatory solipsism. This apparently perfect linking becomes an unquestionable certainty: the expansive ego identifies itself with the external reality, reflecting astrophysical or cosmological knowledge. Finally, obsessed by the omnipotence and omniscience attributed to the divine superego, the blind id suggests to the hallucinated ego their own definitive sacrifice, aiming for the fusion of the three levels of the psyche into a single one, but turning out to be a deluding superegoic effigy since it is totalitarian.

46 Monique Giguère, “L’admiration demeure malgré tout,” *Le Droit* (from Québec’s *Le Soleil*), 12 October 1996, p. 18.

47 Thierry Huguenin, *Le 54e*. Paris: 1996 (1995), pp. 188 and 199.

48 Jean-Yves Roy has produced a psychological description of the shepherd relation: *Le syndrome du berger. Essai sur les dogmatismes contemporains*. N.p.: 1998.

49 Régis Debray, *Cours de médiologie générale*. Paris: 2001 (1991), p. 147.

50 *Encyclopædia universalis* (CD-ROM version 6, Paris): “Narcissisme.” Primary narcissism concerns the body as an unlimited object.

The global context would have justified the imitation of the Supreme Masters.⁵¹ Allegedly, if the Rosicrucian Superiors “have maintained a fair balance between Darkness and Light, what the alchemists call Solve and Coagula,” their experience “has been rejected by all races on the Earth” during the passage from the Pisces era to the Aquarius era.⁵² Contrary to the positive New Age discourse concerning the Aquarian age, the decadence of the human condition has been assessed as serious enough to provoke the abandonment of humanity by the Superiors, followed by that of their agents in the Order of the Solar Temple.

One can say that by following these imaginary entities into their ethereal world, the alchemical “reiteration of the dissolutions and coagulations” allowing us to refine our species: that is, the fecund alternation between the concrete known and the regenerative abstract unknown, was put to an end—in the order’s own logic. Mimetism (unconscious imitation) turns out to be an incomplete explanation: we need to understand why these luminous superior entities have suddenly appeared from nothingness.

Out of Nothingness Experience

In the life of our species, each body is animated by an idea or a system of ideas, and any idea occupies, or has occupied, a body. The capacity of unfolding the body/spirit pair has been suppressed in the Solar Temple’s approach by an idolatrous fixation on a metaphor or concept. Because the stellar light of Sirius was immortality in the mind of the followers of the order, reaching this much desired absolute meant the outcome of the quest for a perfect life. By this *icono-stasis* (etymologically, the fixation of the image) of Sirius, the followers of the order hoped to seal the existential gap which opens up in these vulnerable beings: the “developing humans.” It was thus believed that this gap could be closed by the turgidity of the tautological loop: ego = universe = Ego. The quest of so many followers, directed on an absolutist imaginary model—or “Sirius’s point of view”—led to the fatal outcome, absolutist whatever the mode, full or empty:

The actual man feels abandoned, dreadfully lonely. His interior emptiness is necessary to the investment by the conscience. When completely stripped of everything, plenitude will happen. Thus, by his own divinity, the mere mortal will give way to the Man-God: the Future Solar Race.⁵³

To avoid this deadly trap, the philosopher Manuel de Diéguez exhorts learning to “live in nothingness.” It is a question of mastering recurrent existential anguish, or

51 Or the *imitatio dei* – that is the imitation of the epic of the gods to accomplish the salvation project.

52 Testament—Transit pour le futur, Marhic, p. 227.

53 *Les Cahiers de Sarah*, cited in Abgrall, p. 196.

what the sociologist Peter Beyer considers as a “perceived insecurity” linked to a new situation of rupture.

The anxiety inherent in the unfinished process of globalization gives rise to debates on its unbridled expansion, contradictions, crises or conflicts.⁵⁴ Because of the mutual links between the state or political power and international new religious movements—for example, the infiltration at the top of the public company Hydro-Québec by the OTS⁵⁵—the increase in the searing dangerousness of new religions rather than in their numbers requires the sharpest vigilance.⁵⁶ With the growth of new religions, “residual matters” dramatically re-emerge, such as “personal or group identity . . . , ecological threats [and] increasing disparities in wealth, power, and life chances both within and between regions,” which are of religious affinity.⁵⁷ The feeling of existential “non-fulfilment” stated by philosopher Régis Debray then ensues; this can, however, be assumed and transformed in the creative will to surpass oneself. Taking up this challenge is prevented by the trap of idolatry: “Since the most ancient times, our disabled encephalon exteriorizes fantastic effigies, elevating them to the rank of cosmic persons and giving them an existence outside the conscience.”⁵⁸

Sacred—or even profane—stories enhance the fiction of entities holding an extrahuman omniscience or omnipotence, divinities for example. The interstices of the discourse from which they emerge are as many blind spots before any examination—necessarily blasphemous. The intelligence remains iconoclastic if it refuses to cling to the new illusory versions of the idols, these being sclerotic by definition. This requires becoming aware that any transcendency is immanent in the human spirit, albeit apparently paradoxical. *Physical and psychic* evolution recreates an absence from which a desire emerges or a quest unfolds, revealing a *novel* presence. The searcher of the unknown, both observer and intervener—potentially unfolded in the infinite—is first and foremost a lookout of the fecund nothingness. This *kenosis*⁵⁹ is simultaneously modest and ambitious since it is the sovereign holder of cognitive

54 Cf. Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: 1994, p. 7.

55 Or inversely, the infiltration of official religious organizations or marginal ones, such as secret societies or cults, by secret services.

56 The 11 September 2001 events representing the collapse of the twin totems of the capitalist worldview by a diffuse and elusive Islamist international sect (Al-Qaida), followed by war in Afghanistan and Iraq—which could extend to all of Central Asia and beyond—have exacerbated the general anguish. The security—or the insecurity—of globalization has not only absorbed all its other aspects but also globalization itself. Under this pretext, governments have reacted with thoughtlessness, violent hurry and blind pursuit.

57 Beyer, p. 7. For a fuller discussion on the nature of these residual matters, see *ibid.*, p. 105 ff.

58 Manuel de Diéguez, “Mondialisation, intégrisme : le retour de flammes ; pour une nouvelle rationalité,” 1994, on Manuel de Diéguez—a website with over 150 articles: www.dieguez-philosophe.com.

59 I define *kenosis* (from the Greek *kenos*) as the knowledge procured by nothingness’ intermittent divesting, rather than the theological humiliation of Christ’s Incarnation.

reappraisal. Liberating, the intelligence transforms the existential vertigo into an invigorating spirit, to overcome material or virtual obstacles and continue the exploration of the *terra incognita*. Thus, the psychic descents and ascents alternate on the spiral of the human conscience in gestation.

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Chapter 10

Sects, Media and End of the World

Roland J. Campiche

When addressing the topic of sects, we are faced with the problem caused by the representations that we have of what is religiously “incorrect.” These representations are fueled above all by the media, which have been paying increasing attention to religious issues, especially since the year 2000. This interest has developed in close correlation with sociocultural changes that have been affecting both the area of mass communication and religion. We need only think of the hold of emotional elements or of the transformation of the relationship with authority. Therefore we should not be surprised to observe that the “dramatization of the religious sphere by the media” is—at least partially—beyond the control of even the best-organized religious institutions, and obeys laws that regulate their own discourse.

Furthermore, the relationship that the producer of images, spoken words and texts maintains with the religious sphere cannot help having an impact on the product. In other words, the process of individualization that characterizes modernity is to be considered as a matter of priority when attempting to understand some aspects of transformation of the representations of the religious sphere, which have an effect on religious change itself.¹

Media and Religion in Connection with the Suicide-Massacre of the *Ordre du Temple Solaire*²

Four quotations will serve as my theoretical basis.

The media are not merely communication agencies of a technologically advanced kind engaged in the transmission and diffusion of information. Because of the powerful

1 Cf. Roland J. Campiche, *Quand les sectes affolent. Ordre du Temple Solaire, médias et fin de millénaire. Entretiens avec Cyril Dépraz* (Geneva/Lausanne, 1995).

2 This text dates from after the book written following the events of Cheiry, Salvan and Morin Heights: Campiche, *Quand les sectes affolent*. It contains some elements of the line of argument developed below; the latter has been expanded on with the comments made by numerous colleagues further to the publication of the above-mentioned book. It also takes account of the dramatic event in the Vercors (December 1995), which served to verify the validity of the argument previously defended. A first version in French was published under the title *Sectes, médias, fin des temps*, by Françoise Champion and Martine Cohen (eds), in *Sectes et Démocratie* (Paris, 1999), pp. 290–99.

institutions which they have evolved, they have, willy nilly, created a culture of their own, with its own values and priorities, heroes and, no less equally accepted, villains. They operate impersonally in perfect congruity with the increasing depersonalization of the role-articulated social system. But they also imitate communal culture and manipulate the symbols of a more intimate and personal world.³

This media culture extends to the sphere of religion, where the media are not content with reproducing specialists' opinions but prefer to position themselves as authoritative interpreters of the phenomenon in question.

The media obey their own laws as far as perception of reality is concerned. Only someone who knows and cracks this code is able to relativize the way in which the media present reality. This is particularly important for a topic such as drugs and politics because the vast majority of the public is familiar with these issues, mainly through the description of them given by the media. While it is true that readers purchase the newspapers that reinforce their prejudices, the choice of titles in a region and the undifferentiated opinions on editorial staffs have a doubly negative effect on objectivity and consensus.⁴

This observation can be transposed to the religious sphere, particularly to its poorly known "zones" of sects and "new religious movements." The two conventional and conflicting hypotheses on the influence of the media, which are considered to be either "omnipotent" or "ordinary reflections of public opinion" can be replaced by a new hypothesis on the power of the media's impact when the public are unfamiliar with an issue.

Sensational stories about the "new religious movements" do not require a knowledge of religion on the part of users of the mass media. The focus on the non-religious aspects of the movements means there is no need to address the problems relating to beliefs or religious experience. By drawing a parallel with stories of fraud, political exploitation, racketeering and crime, the public is offered a script to which it is accustomed. In short, the anti-sects movement provides journalists with material that does not require much adaptation for it to be easily ingested by a public that does not have much taste for religion.⁵

This observation, which reinforces the hypothesis set out above, is echoed by Jean Baubérot's⁶ reaction to Chapter One of *Quand les sectes affolent* (1995) in a personal correspondence to me:

3 Bryan Wilson, "Culture and religion", *Revue suisse de sociologie*, special edition, *Religion et Culture*, 17/3 (1991): 444.

4 Boris Boller, *Der Drogendiskurs der Schweizer Presse. Zweijahresbericht 1993–1994. Eine quantitative Inhaltsanalyse zur Drogenberichterstattung der Schweizer Presse*, "Cahiers de recherches et de documentation de l'Institut universitaire de médecine sociale et préventive", nos 111–12 (Lausanne, 1995).

5 James A. Beckford, "Cults, conflicts, and journalists", in Robert Towler (ed.), *New Religions and the New Europe* (Aarhus, 1995), p. 103.

6 Jean Baubérot is Emeritus Professor of l'Ecole pratique des hautes études (EPHE) in Paris, where he was formerly director.

In becoming diversified, the religious sphere is experienced less and less directly and is increasingly perceived through the (distorting? magnifying?) mirror of the media. Perhaps the preliminary step before a sociological approach is to allow people to dissociate themselves from the media's gaze. (Letter dated 20 December 1995)

Religiously Correct and Sectarian Danger

The way the *Ordre du Temple Solaire* (OTS) was treated by the media revealed the existence of what we might call the "religiously correct," which expresses the expectation or representation that religion cannot be a source of conflict in a secular society. This representation of what is religiously correct obscures the historical relationship between religion and violence and strengthens the theory of privatization of religion. The position can be explained if one considers that the generation of *baby boomers*, which believes in religion without institutions,⁷ is currently the generation which is in control of the media.

The type of explanation put forward to explain the suicide-massacre oscillates between two levels of individual and collective argumentation. The individual explanation generally takes the route via psychology, confirming what was observed, for example, at Waco, where credence was given to the opinions advocating abnormal individual behavior and submission to a guru.⁸ As for the arguments at the collective level, they form part of the familiar script: money-laundering, arms smuggling, corrupt practice. It will be noted, however, that virtually all the analyzed editorials written the day after 5 October 1994 in France and French-speaking Switzerland refer to the collapse of reference points. But none of them—with one notable exception—goes as far as to say that "human beings are religious animals who need values," thereby explaining a religious phenomenon in religious terms.

In some cases the sect was treated as a dangerous consumer product. The programme in the *A bon entendeur* series on French-speaking Swiss television on 25 October 1994, entitled "Sects, how to get out of them?", is a good example. Other programmes blew out of all proportion the extraordinary features of certain religious groups, but without putting them in context or attempting to verify whether the beliefs being discredited might make sense to the persons involved (such as the programme *Sans aucun doute* on the French television channel TF1 on 10 January 1996).

The need to put programmes together in a hurry does not explain the choice of proposed interpretations, because it can clearly be seen that when the media return to the tragic event, they do not change their register but continue to treat the subject according to the script—that is, to explain the dramatic event in non-religious terms.

7 The term "spirituality" indeed denotes the personal, experience-based beliefs characteristic of this generation, which are differentiated from a religion conceived in terms of dogmas and tradition.

8 Beckford, p. 107; James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley/London, 1995), p. 18.

Further proof of this is the media coverage that followed the second OTS suicide-massacre at Chérennes. Little change can be perceived in the way the problem was approached and the “sixty-nine dead in the name of a sect” were covered (53 in the first suicide-massacre and 16 in the second). The exceptions were rare: the commentaries on French-speaking Swiss television, for example, became more moderate, leaving room for a qualified explanation, differentiating between sects and paying attention to the circumstances that may cause them to “drift out of control.”

The Sociologist Faced with the Force of Representations and the Emotional Factor

Can one propose an analysis and an explanation that do not form part of the script? After the dramatic events at Cheiry and Granges-sur-Salvan, my reply is in the negative. It appears impossible to change or even attenuate the representation of the sect as a group of people under the sway of a “guru,” whose actions are suspect and concealed. It is even difficult to get people to perceive the heterogeneity of the universe of religious minorities. Stigmatization of their internal diversity, which was previously effected by religious institutions, has thus been taken over by civil society. The observation has a paradoxical aspect in light of the social legitimacy conferred on religious pluralism.

Seen from this perspective, an explanation that emphasizes an analysis of religion and the religious process (seeking salvation, the quest for purity, breaking away from the world, the limits of religious recomposition) is not adopted. Yet in a secondary analysis the hypothesis claiming that the population adopts the script without any other form of examination is only partially verified. Let me give some evidence of this. An analysis of about one hundred questions asked by viewers during the French-speaking Swiss television programme *Table ouverte* on Sunday 14 January 1996 reveals that the prime concern of those who phoned in was to obtain information, as they insistently asked for a definition of “sect.” Questions followed about the repression/freedom alternative, characterized by the worry about control, but in a rather partial way. It should be noted that of the three questions concerned with the causes of the dramatic event, only one placed the problem in the context of society. This observation shows the difficulty of proposing an analysis of the relationship between social change and religious change, or of revealing religion as a component of social life.

Faced with the media, the sociologist can only take note of the successive collapse of all monopoly positions when it comes to interpreting the phenomenon of religion. After the theologians, it was the turn of the social scientists to gauge the limits of their possibilities or their ability to get people to understand social phenomena. It does not suffice to take a critical position amid the conflicting interpretations. One still has to propose explanations that are capable of contributing to political management of “borderline” situations, such as that illustrated by the transit of the members of the

Solar Temple, or even of creating the conditions liable to prevent a fatal outcome, such as that of Waco. In doing so, we are accepting our social responsibility.

Ordre du Temple Solaire and the Recomposition of Religion

The changes undergone by this Order deserve our attention; in many respects its trajectory might help us to understand a type of religious recomposition whose logic obeys more the law of supply and demand (depending on the circumstances, preference is given to the religious message over fashion and what attracts people) than that of building a new, more or less exclusive religious tradition. In other words, the OTS would appear to constitute a religious group with a “variable gnosis.” The promise of salvation is characteristic of any religious movement; it implies a judgment about the world. It may have been stated here in apocalyptic terms, involving the construction of bunkers and the distribution of survival kits. It may have taken the New Age route, linking the announcement of disaster and the advent of a new age prepared by self-transformational work, as was well described by Françoise Champion (1995). The announcement of salvation finally took the form of transit, a notion probably borrowed from astrology, esotericism or even belief in flying saucers,⁹ but accompanied by elements taken from Buddhism or Hinduism, since the idea of a return to Earth (reincarnation) was also present. The fact that the OTS leaders Joseph Di Mambro and Luc Jouret had made use of these different elements and had incorporated them into an esoteric organization of the Rosicrucian type appears to be proven by the inquiry. Nothing tells us, however, that the members followed them along this tortuous path; like the *seekers* described by Wade Clark Roof (1993), they were able to make OTS a stage in their spiritual quest. In this sense, sharing the same convictions would have been less important for them than the exchange and communion brought about by similar experiences. Their attitude would therefore not be very different from that identified in other religious networks today.¹⁰ These few remarks justify use of the concept of “post-*New Age* order,” which describes the OTS as an extreme and perhaps atypical version of contemporary religious recomposition.

Four hypotheses can be stated about the OTS’s final uncontrolled drift, in view of the fact that research aimed at understanding the “end of OTS” is far from complete. They range from the particular to the general.

The first is that of *the logic of failure*. It had already been proposed by Jacques Gutwirth (1979) in connection with the tragic end of Jim Jones’s Temple of the People in Guyana. The dissent within the OTS as early as 1990 and the ensuing resignations, the cashflow problems, Jouret’s trouble with the police in Quebec, Di

9 Jean-François Mayer, *Les Mythes du Temple Solaire* (Geneva, 1996).

10 Liliane Voyé, “Belgique: crise de la civilisation paroissiale et recompositions du croire”, in G. Davie and D. Hervieu-Léger (eds), *Identités religieuses en Europe* (Paris, 1996), p. 208ff.

Mambro's illness and perhaps the impossibility of proposing a credible new gnosis are all elements that explain the collective massacres-suicides.

Then *the stigmatization felt by the members*, particularly following the first massacre-suicide, may have led them to become even more inward-looking, reinforcing their feeling of being special, of possessing the only true truth or of not being able to bear the ironic look of other people. Survivor Thierry Huguenin's attitude is symptomatic in this respect.¹¹

The third hypothesis, known as that of the "*explosive cocktail*", explains the incompatibility of the different religious traditions to which the OTS leaders referred, either separately or by mixing them up. This hypothesis is controversial. Some people, like Carl Keller (with Raphaël Aubert), by relying on the texts, see the OTS as the pure heir of esoteric gnosis. To my mind, this argument does not hold water if one analyses the link between the producers of the texts, the texts produced and the effect brought about by the texts. In relation to the apocalyptic solution, the Age of Aquarius and transit do not constitute similar replies to the question of salvation (the effects are manifestly different). This third hypothesis explains why the existence of the OTS had to be terminated, as the contradictions were becoming too flagrant; it does not enable us to understand the final act itself but it has the advantage of asking the question about the limits of religious recomposition.

I am borrowing the fourth hypothesis from psychology, although I am altering its meaning. A dissociation may have existed, based on personality disorders and the existence of a mental structure in which each of the personalities present thinks and behaves autonomously and with no relation with the other(s). This hypothesis might explain the *dissociation* that has been made *between the religious sphere and the other spheres of social life*, owing to the extreme fragmentation of our societies and growing individualization. At the same time it would make it possible to explain the incredible: that is, the ability of OTS members to conceal their intentions and to live right up to the last moment "as if nothing was going to happen." But it also dramatically provides an example of the process of decomposition of the religious sphere, "which is said to be committing suicide" through its inability to propose a social utopia or to provide a general meaning. In short, the mental dissociation is founded on the rift between religion and the social bond, as illustrated by the tragic fate of the OTS.

Thus owing to the fragility of the knowledge available to us—to which the four hypotheses set out above testify—it appears that the OTS tragedy, as covered in the media, teaches us less about the reasons that led its members to embark on the "journey to Sirius" than about contemporary representations of the religious phenomenon. The media are developing a "religiously correct" discourse, linked to the values of a democratic society, to civic-mindedness and basic morality. They are evading the fact that religious phenomena are also a force behind, and a reflection of, social violence.

11 Thierry Huguenin, *Le 54e* (Mesnil-sur-l'Estrée, 1995).

With the passing of time, one could have imagined that the OTS case would be distinguished from the case of other sects. Apparently, nothing of that kind has happened. The affirmation that sect equals danger is now a stereotype. The questions asked by journalists on the tenth anniversary of the OTS's suicide-massacre testify to this evolution. The use of the sociological concept of sect to nominate this type of religious organization is problematic and aims at a deontological discussion. So it is no surprise to discover in the evangelical movement a trend demanding that the communities of this Protestant tradition be called denominations instead of sects.

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Appendix 1

The Testaments¹

To All Those Who Can Still Understand the Voice of Wisdom ... We Address This Last Message

The current chaos leads man inescapably to face the failure of his Destiny.

In the course of time, the cycles have followed one another in accordance with precise rhythms and laws. Different civilizations disappeared in the course of cataclysms that were destructive but regenerative; nonetheless none of these reached a level of decadence such as ours.

Subjected to the devastating effects of individual and collective egocentricity, marked by a total ignorance of the Laws of the Spirit and Life, this civilization will no longer escape sudden self-destruction.

From time immemorial, philosophers, prophets and misfortunes have followed one another to help man to take his place as a creator. Man's refusal to See and to Hear each time has diverted the Plans foreseen by Cosmic Evolution.

We, the servants of the Rose+Croix, possessors of an authentic and ancestral Wisdom, affirm that we have worked throughout time for the Evolution of Consciousness. Philosophies, sciences, holy sites and temples remain as living testimonies of this.

The plan of action of these Beings was collected and programmed within the crypts or the sanctuaries, according to precise parameters, hidden from the secular world, but recognized by the initiated.

We, the Servants of the Rose+Croix, declare that throughout all eternity, the Solar and Universal Temple manifests itself amongst men according to cycles of activity and dormancy. After having solemnly opened their Doors on March 21, 1981, in Geneva, in a Secret Lodge, the ancient domain of the Malta Order, its final esoteric action lasted eleven years.

During this cycle, the Grail, Excalibur, the Candelabra of the Seven Branches and the Ark of the Covenant were revealed to the living witnesses, the final and faithful Servants of the Eternal Rose+Croix. Following which, false slanders and every kind of treason and scandal, judiciously orchestrated by different existing powers, sounded the knell for a last attempt to regenerate the Plans of Conscience.

1 Translated from the French by Carol Cunningham, revised and edited by Richard Smoley. Punctuation, word order, and sentence structure are as much as possible designed to replicate the original. Ellipses are as in the original; they do not indicate omissions.

Those who have breached our Code of Honor are considered traitors. They have suffered and will suffer the punishment they deserve for the ages of the ages.

All is accomplished according to the mandates of Immanent Justice. We hereby affirm that we are in truth, the judges appointed by a Superior Order.

In view of the present irreversible situation, We, the Servants of the Rose+Croix, strongly reaffirm that we are not a part of this world and that we are perfectly aware of the coordinates of our Origins and our Future.

We proclaim, without desiring to create vain polemics, that:

The Great White Lodge of Sirius has decreed the Call of the last authentic Bearers of an Ancestral Wisdom;

- Justice and Sentence will be applied according to the parameters of a Superior Universal Order with the rigor imposed by the Law;
- The Seven Entities of the Great Pyramid of Gizeh left the Secret Chamber during the night of March 31, 1993, taking with them the capital Energy-Conscience of the seven fundamental planets of our solar system;
- The last Elder Brothers of the Rose+Croix have planned their transit in accordance with criteria known only to themselves. After having transmitted to their Servants the means of completing the Work, they left this world on January 6, 1994, at 12:04 a.m. in Sydney, for a new cycle of Creation.

We, the Servants of the Rose+Croix, considering the urgency of the present situation, affirm:

- that we refuse to participate in systems set up by this decadent humanity;
- that we have planned, in a full state of consciousness, without any fanaticism, our transit which has nothing to do with suicide in the human sense of the term;
- that according to a decree emanating from the Great White Lodge of Sirius, we have closed and voluntarily blown up all the sanctuaries of the Secret Lodges so that they will not be desecrated by impostors or by the ignorant;
- that, from the Planes where we will work from now on and by a just law of magnetism, we will be in the position of calling back the last Servants capable of hearing this last message.

Every slander, lie or falsehood about our deed could only be translated, once more, as the refusal to understand and fathom the Mystery of Life and Death.

Space is short, time is ending. It is with an unfathomable Love, ineffable joy, and without any regret that we leave this world.

Men, cry not over our fate, but rather cry for your own. Ours is more enviable than yours.

To you who are receptive to this last message, may our Love and our Peace accompany you during the terrible tests of the Apocalypse that await you. Know that

from where we will be, we will always hold our arms open to receive those who are worthy of joining us.

The Rose+Croix

The Rose+Croix has definitely not finished surprising you.

From time immemorial, it has not ceased for one moment to manifest its Presence:

- Behind the greatest Initiates, as behind the most humble, in the Service of the ALL, sometimes discreet, sometimes provocative,
- On foot, in a limousine, or on a Boeing 747, omnipresent and imperceptible, it “IS”!

It has won over the most distinguished personalities in Science, Philosophy, and Religion. It has called men to generosity, altruism and brotherhood.

It has preached nonviolence, internationalism; it has dreamed of a strong and serene science, in man’s service, for the good of all;

It has dreamed of a power founded on justice, Peace, tolerance.

It has dreamed of a Religion, based on reason, wisdom, understanding, charity and also love.

Without hell, without the stake, or excommunication.

It has always promised to those who join its ranks, the most wonderful of all gifts: “IMMORTALITY.”

It is always there, curiously tireless, obstinately present despite and against everything.

It is not out of breath, but rather it seems ready to move at a higher speed.

This is so, because three from among them, on Friday August 13, left for Sydney, from where they were sent to Ayers Rock.

Does not the rock of Ayers Rock, world of the First Born correspond to the mountain of the Prophets? That so-called mountain of the Prophets is felt to shelter the people that sanctified it, because it holds the Secret of the Secrets.

The three messengers, after a stay of three days, returned to Sydney. During an unexpected and unusual evening, one of them was inhabited by one of the Three Mysterious Beings from On High.

The secrets that were revealed to him are a heavy load to carry. This is because, among the three of them, unconscious but true, they carry the deposit.

At the price of hard and laborious tests, their mission is to ensure the preservation of the Tradition, by creating an acting center that will ensure the transmission of that which they were not able to finish, not allowing it to be ignored, that the direction of Agartha is brought about in the Collegial way.

It aims to ensure justice and the maintenance of equilibrium for the redemption of our planet.

Committed to a solemn oath, it remains faithful to its Ideal.

Today the Elder Brothers of the Rose+Croix have been prematurely put to sleep because of incomprehension, libel, blackmail of all kinds, police pressure, the hateful slander of a degenerate humanity whose absurd and senseless attacks, ever increasing, are now dangerous and destructive to that which remains to be saved.

The powers that be, corrupt to the highest degree, follow only one goal: to stifle this flame, which is too much in the way of their quest for despotism and personal and private interests; this to the detriment of a humanity manipulated and exploited by these powers.

In addition to the legend, let us be permitted to declare that the world of Victory will be entered only by those who are deserving.

You who await at the Portico *before* being *appointed*, need know that the real discovery is that you must descend three levels to attain the Sanctuary.

These three levels are: Heaven, Earth, Hell.

As the three aspects of man are: Spirit, Soul, Body.

To finally reascend by the three churches, which are Peter's, John's and that of Christ and Melchizedek.

Finally, to complete the Work, it is necessary that the 22 steps of the stairway responsible for conducting the neophyte toward the Light, indicate that Wisdom must be totally controlled in order to know Illumination and that it is dangerous to not be prepared, by means of one's just actions, when one wishes to enter into the Sanctuary.

Preserving the Tradition, favoring the spiritual evolution of humanity, the eternal Rose+Croix perpetuates itself in Time and Space while keeping watch on the evolution of beings and worlds.

This is because, when the silent rotations seem to pass in the distant horizon, the Scripture will be fulfilled.

It is said that when the Child of the Stars is in its fourth year, three from among them, who have preceded him, will leave this world in order to regain the place that was assigned to them.

This is how the solar bark of Osiris works.

Nothing is lost, nothing is created, everything is transformed and everything is renewed in a Space–Time continuum.

Alternately hunted down and adulated, the Immortal Rose+Croix will follow its path more than ever.

Its mission will remain forever and ever.

It is into their strange and incredible universe that they invite you to enter ...

Transit to the Future

Neither the races nor human Evolution are the fruit of chance. They are ruled by an Occult Brotherhood made up of 33 Masters (The Elder Brothers of the Rose+Croix), as well as a few Adepts gathered in small and discreet brotherhoods.

Having completed their human evolution, their entity uses borrowed bodies to manifest in this world and to accomplish the Divine Purpose. Beyond time and space, these high-ranking Initiates always recognize and find each other in order to organize mutations, modify the structure of Nature, transform brute Matter so that the Consciousness of the kingdoms evolves harmoniously toward higher levels of being.

Although their membership in this Brotherhood remained secret, by their presence, their influence, and their action, they have marked the great shifts of Evolution.

Being out of time, they are not of any particular epoch, their name or the label of their organization matters little, we shall simply say that they appear and disappear at precise times, always at the most critical moments of civilization.

Until today, they have maintained a proper balance between the Light and Darkness, which is what the alchemists call Solve and Coagula.

Alas, it isn't until after their departure that men realize, partially and often in a deformed way, the true value of their Message.

Particularly in this difficult transition from the Age of Pisces to Aquarius, the higher Experience that they radiated was rejected by all the races of the Earth.

Men, hiding behind false truths that they have constructed, violate Natural Laws, and look for security in illusory and fleeting comforts. Forgetting the Universal Law of Exchange, they are only interested in personal profit and immediate pleasure—always to the detriment of others—while neglecting the noble and fulfilling enjoyments that Nature offers them.

Humanity as a whole rejects every model of reference capable of educating it in nobility of spirit. It delights only in anarchy, degradation, the dispersion it suffers, powerless, being itself devoid of all will and discernment. It speaks of an illusory liberty but succumbs to the most complete slavery.

All men of worth are reduced to silence by vile blackmail, which can reach the extreme of assassination because they don't wish to serve the interests of this world.

The blissful illusion of those who believe that the world is improving and that man is progressing cannot see the light of day, because they remain victims of their division and of their own illusion.

The present planetary situation slips irreversibly out of all human control. The refusal of an accelerated mutation process gives rise to the degeneration of all religious, familial, social, political, economic, and law-enforcement values ...

All positive and creative forces are strangled. Man has become a wolf to man. Incapable of respecting himself and respecting Nature, he shall reap the fruit of his own degeneracy.

Everything has been said, everything has been done to reveal man to himself. He has no excuse. Renouncing his Origin and his Future, he is already beginning to reap what he has sown.

No force or will shall hold back the fulfillment of the Divine justice which is none other than the Great Law of Cause and Effect.

The Elder Brothers of the Order of the Rose+Croix and their Adepts, likened wrongly to the manipulative sects of the Forces called “black,” ... act according to parameters which are not of this world.

Knowing too well the Natural Laws and above all the Cosmic Laws, at no point have they been led astray in deviations or questionable practices.

They have all attempted to assume and sustain the equilibrium of the Forces that today can no longer be contained, the number of conscientious and responsible bearers diminishing to the degree that the race falls into decay.

Humans seek nothing but to destroy, by whatever means, the Work of those who have undertaken everything to bring them true freedom and well-being, by an applied knowledge and respect for the laws, to teach them:

- to take in nourishment whereby the living Consciousness of the Kingdoms can still be assimilated;
- to develop discipline in life, a mastering of events and energy to be Free Men;
- to acquire a strong will, giving them the means to think for themselves without allowing themselves to be manipulated by interests and powers;
- to live within a spirit of human brotherhood being conscious of the respect and the interaction of all kingdoms and races;
- to unite, not in a superficial way in sterile and degrading amusements, but in reconciling the antagonisms inherent in the human duality;
- to increase the Knowledge of the Universal Laws by working beyond intellectualism and in accordance with the Spirit of the Great Tradition, in social environments bound by geographic and temporal contingencies of the time;
- to elevate their consciousness and go beyond the stage of beliefs built on images and idolatries, while feeling themselves to be an integral part of a Cosmic Whole, because man is multiple in form, but remains ONE in Spirit, ONE in Essence.

Whatever those who hear this last Message may think, the Elder Brothers and we ourselves affirm that: whatever the means used, we have worked impersonally, nobly fought the Battle, without ever using the weapons of the Adversary, neither destruction, nor violence, nor hatred, nor fanaticism ... but in a full state of consciousness and in perfect accord with the Laws of the Universe.

Our action has gone beyond the material and human context of our environment to reach the Planes of Life itself, so as to define the Path of Return of a whole Cosmic Evolution.

Having transmitted all the Knowledge and the Means to permit Man to be a Creative and Universal being, the Elder Brothers and ourselves refuse to participate in the assassination of our bearer the Earth, and we remove ourselves from this world where our voices can no longer be heard.

Our Conscientious and voluntary Transition influences, consciously or not, all those who share this noble heritage and accept in themselves the Christic Fire in a living way.

Since we know *who we are, where we come from, where we are going*, and are aware of our future, we give shape today to the conditions of a preestablished Plan from other times.

We leave this Earth to rediscover, with all clarity and in all freedom, a Dimension of Truth and the Absolute, far from the hypocrisies and the oppression of this world, to realize the seed of our future Generation.

So the Prophecies are fulfilled according to the Scriptures and we are but their humble and noble Servants.

Having always belonged to the Kingdom of the Spirit, being incarnated without breaking the subtle tie that unites the Creature to the Creator, we return to our Abode.

All the proofs were given to us during our incarnation to authenticate the veracity of our step. Certain people will consider it a suicide or a cowardly act in the face of difficulties, others will consider it depression in the face of tests by which each one was overwhelmed, *THEY MAKE A MISTAKE*.

We leave the proof that our transit will have been lived in joy and fullness, that it was carried out with discretion, the lived knowledge of an exact science and in harmony with the natural rules of Matter and of the Spirit which are truly "ONE."

The race is heading irreversibly toward its own destruction. All of Nature is turning against those who have abused it, who have corrupted and desecrated it on every level. Man will pay heavy tribute for he remains no less than the only one responsible for it.

Awaiting favorable conditions for a possible Return, we will not participate in the annihilation of the human kingdom, no more than we will allow our bodies to be dissolved by the alchemical slowness of Nature, because we don't want to run the risk of their being soiled by madmen and maniacs.

Remember Sodom and Gomorrah! ...

It will soon be just the same! ...

To Lovers of Justice

This letter is addressed to those who, in this rotten world, remain devoted to justice and Truth.

Let them read these lines with inner peace, free of all bias and with an open spirit.

Let the events which have entertained the Canadian press during the past several months permit everyone to recognize that everywhere in the world politicians, financiers and judicial officials have delighted in scorning democracy, squandering

public resources, [and] manipulating, through the intermediary of a mass media hungry for scandals and sensationalist events, whole crowds of people which they themselves have rendered totally passive and unconscious.

Once again our Action will no doubt unleash many passions. This is so, even when everywhere in the world the most barbarous crimes and genocides are taking place, met with an almost total indifference.

Shall we always pretend to forget that we are all part of human evolution? Today none can ignore his responsibility for the irreparable destruction of our earth and the heritage bequeathed to our children. The present degeneracy confirms once more that beyond simple human will, beyond appearances, a destructive and regenerative chaos is preparing to engender a new tomorrow which will be born from the ashes of our decadent civilization.

In this context, the year 1993 was marked in Quebec by the political-judicial scandal perpetrated against the Order of the Solar Temple and ARCHS. Amongst numerous members as well as the principal people in charge, Mr Jean-Pierre Vinet and Dr Luc Jouret were the victims of slander and false accusations of the most sordid kind for many months, such as: debauchery, individual or collective manipulation, swindling, illegal drug dealing, possession of weapons, etc. ...

This was a great deal, especially for men whose actions have only been motivated by desire to help the Beings in search of justice and to awaken in them the Spirit of an Eternal Knighthood through the Order to which they belong.

Let us remember that more than 80 agents of the Security Guard of Quebec were mobilized to launch a general investigation on the activities of the above-mentioned organizations. During this whole affair, the attitude of the Security Guard of Quebec was particularly questionable, ambiguous and cowardly. The investigation and the different police operations (the use of armored cars, machine guns, untimely arrests ...) carried out with a great deal of publicity, have cost Quebec and Canadian taxpayers more than \$6 million. If it were not for its tragic and pitiful aspect, one would want to laugh at the absurdity of the affair.

Throughout the investigation, unscrupulous reporters excelled in perfidious manipulations consisting of misinforming the public. We specifically mention Mr Pelchat, whose responsibilities were great during this somber and nauseating spectacle.

Since no proof existed, government and police officials strove to fabricate an evil scenario of a "*plot of terrorists whose subversive activities were financed by dangerous sects ...*"

Several members of the Solar Temple Order and of ARCHS were in this manner submitted to hateful harassment (lengthy interrogations, public arrests, blackmail, pressure from the mass media, the use of false documents ...). Not even their children were spared.

All of this intervention, along with biased trials, finally ended in a conditional acquittal for misdemeanors in the case of Messrs Delorme, Vinet, and Jouret. The accused were invited to donate \$1,000 to the Red Cross.

Let us openly and directly pose the following questions:

1) Why did the Security Guard of Quebec work to continue a senseless investigation, when their own informers confirmed from the beginning of the affair that no criminal suspect existed on any level? Even the official responsible for tapping telephone conversations for the region of Montreal confirmed that the information was delivered to reporters during the investigation by high-ranking officials, answering to the Minister of the Interior, Mr Ryan, personally.

2) Why was Mr Jouret identified with a certain André Masse, the leader of the Q37, a hypothetical network of more than 37 terrorists whose plans were supposedly to take the lives of several politicians, including Mr Bourassa and Mr Ryan, people whose names Dr Jouret hardly knew?

3) Why reveal to the Press, with a great deal of publicity, the existence of Q37 when they had never been able to establish anything about the actual existence of this group? Let us remember that the search warrants were abusively and illegally served, based on this allegation.

The arguments presented by the police agents and politicians amply demonstrate their intent to conjure a plot so as to be able to intervene with total against the Solar Temple Order and ARCHS as well as their leaders.

4) Why was false information ostensibly disseminated (with the support of audiovisual set-ups) regarding the existence of the trafficking of weapons to La-Fleur, when the authorities of the Security Guard of Quebec knew perfectly well that all of the allegations were unfounded?

5) Why was Mrs Rose-Marie Klaus of Saint-Anne-de-la-Pérade pressured to appear at length on several television and radio broadcasts and in the press to confirm the worst lies, slanders, vulgar and ill-tempered accusations? Certain authorities in the mass media have in this way deliberately taken advantage of a person who is visibly in a precarious psychiatric state.

6) Why have reporters lent their support to such libelous violence concerning us? Why were all the voices that were raised in an attempt to establish the truth systematically stifled or muffled? The scenario strangely resembles the kind of manipulation of the media orchestrated by certain dictatorships.

Let us remember the strange similarity between the Quebec affair and that which took place in the USA (cf. Nexus, annex²). Is this a simple coincidence, or could it rather have been staged by politicians or judicial authorities whose criminal schemes led them to fear the publicizing of certain disturbing truths?

7) Why were the contents of the teachings of the Solar Temple Order and ARCHS systematically silenced during the entire scandal, as well as those distributed by Dr Jouret through conferences, seminars, television and radio broadcasts, press releases, tapes, audiovisual documents, books, etc. ... Our detractors know too well that the only objective of these teachings is to ennoble the conscience of man.

2 A reference to events in Waco, Texas, as reported in the Australian magazine *Nexus*.

8) Why does the mass media, who organized the scandal in collaboration with judicial and political authorities, obstinately refrain from clearly stating the decisions of the Court in regards to the three persons accused.

9) Why did the authorities of Hydro-Quebec, after having carried out a meticulous and costly investigation in regards to the supposed infiltration of their company by the Solar Temple Order, get rid of Mr Vinet, one of their best managers, when all the investigations proved his innocence? Why, once again, did the Press pass over in silence the results of the investigations conducted by Hydro-Quebec?

10) Why did the Security Guard of Quebec persist in systematically intimidating some members of the Order of the Temple after having destabilized this organization, when dangerous, manipulative cults, known perfectly well to the judicial authorities, devote themselves freely to their activities, endangering the mental, emotional or psychic stability of their members and of society at large?

11) Why did the authorities allow, without any reaction, certain Mohawks to appear at length on television, to describe openly and without scruples the different forms of trafficking (cigarettes, drugs, etc.) that they devote themselves to?

Why did they permit these dangerous, lawless beings to openly exhibit all their weapons (including assault weapons), which they have in their possession, without incurring minimal judicial pursuit?

Why the guilty silence of the Security Guard of Quebec or of the political authorities, including Mr Ryan, against them?

The cowardice of the Security Guard of Quebec is only equaled by its incompetence in controlling certain particularly dangerous groups who devote themselves with all impunity to the most horrible violence.

The simple evidence once again clearly demonstrates the close bonds that exist between the Security Guard of Quebec and criminal groups such as the Mafia, among others.

Of course, it's much easier to attack honest people, who are not broken down by the extortions of a totally deviated social structure, humanly and materially impoverished by drugs, alcoholism, pornography and other perversions which are the shame of our so-called democratic societies.

Certainly everyone knows that the Security Guard of Quebec, on the eve of being granted certain credits, had to reestablish its value after having been implicated in several gross errors, clear failures in the face of robbery, the implication of certain agents in illegal trafficking. ...

The facts that have unfolded oblige us to pose the question of whom the Security Guard, originally intended to serve the citizens, actually serves.

Therefore, we strongly denounce all existing authorities that have shown such cynicism and cowardice during this scandal.

An article that appeared in the Australian magazine *Nexus* of February 1994 entitled "Towards the New World Order, The Secret Police Force of the United States" describes the situation that would come to pass at this present time in the USA.

A particularly troubling coincidence between the scandal in Quebec and the Waco affair should make us reflect on the true motives of the powers that be.

This is why, in the face of this somber affair, we affirm that the politicians, among them Mr Bourassa and mainly Mr Ryan, are responsible for having financed a particularly dirty and questionable operation in order to conceal some of their own intrigues. In view of discoveries which occurred progressively after the end of the trial, it surfaced that Mr Ryan was apparently personally manipulated and financed by Opus Dei. This secret group, whose activities worldwide smack more of organized banditry on a high scale than of those attempting to elevate souls in search of Justice and Truth. This is not to deny that possibly other secret organizations could have intervened in an illegal manner to organize the scandal (we were warned of the existence of official police forces and other parallel forces who were seeking to destroy us). This was aimed at disintegrating the structure by which certain members, as faithful servants of the Rose+Croix, in the course of the last cycle of the awakening of the Temple, had access to the Mysteries of the Holy Grail in the sanctuaries of the last Secret Lodges of the R+C.

We also affirm that, in other countries, among them France, Australia, Switzerland, and Martinique, false accusations were also uttered, without ever having been able to furnish any proof.

We affirm that to conceal their political, economical, social, and police bankruptcy, governments use the same means and process of misinformation, intimidation, and manipulation as those that were used in the blackest periods of history.

It is sufficient to note all the futile, lying, and useless distortions of international authorities concerning current conflicts in the world, in order to convince oneself of the existence of a secret evil organization on a worldwide scale, highly supported financially, and determined to silence or destroy all those who would be likely to interfere with their interests.

Warned a long time ago of the existence of this order, we have managed to frustrate their plans concerning us. Thus, despite everything and beyond appearances, the authentic bearers of an ancestral wisdom have been able to perpetuate the Work.

Also, in the face of this generalized incapacity of the assembly of heads of nations and their blatant dishonesty and greed, even though they assert themselves to be defenders of Liberty and Human Rights, in the face of the systematic development of lies and manipulation, in the face of the ever-accelerating anarchic squandering of the Earth's resources, in the face of the refusal of man to comply with his Monarchy as the Coronation of the Work, in the face of the systematic persecution of the Bearers of Light (J.F. Kennedy, Gandhi, Martin Luther King, etc. ...), in the face of the general degradation of the human race, incapable of stifling its destructive impulses, in the face of the growing ascent of ecological, climatic, chemical, nuclear, military perils ... and above all in the face of intimidations by police and of all orders of which we are continually victims, everywhere where we have worked and everywhere where we have strived to unveil the Mysteries of the Great Tradition, we have decided to withdraw ourselves from this world, with all lucidity and in full consciousness.

In this way, we leave this society where the Man of Heart and Spirit is systematically silenced and banished because of his Faith and his Membership in a Universal Order whose parameters are not of this world.

Appendix 2

Order TS: Ritual for the Donning of the Talar and the Cross¹

*Non nobis Domine non nobis
sed nomini tuo da gloriam.*
Not for us, Lord, not for us
but to thy name give glory.

This Ritual remains the sole property of the ORDER TS, mandated by the “Mother Lodge of the Secret Covenants” which may at any time request its immediate restitution without explanation. It is of course understood that no copy of any kind should be made. All officers must promise this on their honour.

MATERIALS AND THEIR DISPOSITION

The Master of Ceremonies must prepare the Temple according to the instructions and plan given below.

4 LECTERNS: 1 at each Cardinal Point.

- on the Lectern to the NORTH: a RED candle
- on the Lectern to the EAST: a YELLOW candle
- on the Lectern to the SOUTH: a GREEN candle
- on the Lectern to the WEST: a BLUE candle

All candles are lit.

A SWORD must be placed, pointing downwards, leaning against the Lectern of the Master of the Ritual.

The SHEKINAH in the centre, the apex of the Triangle facing West. On the Shekinah, a candelabrum holding 3 long white candles. There should also be matches.

¹ This ritual was given to me (Henrik Bogdan) in the form of a photocopy by Jean-François Mayer in 2004, and was transcribed by me in February 2005.

front of the Shekinah.

4) How to conduct the Neophytes

The first Escort takes the first Neophyte by the arm. The others follow and do it exactly the same way (tuning at the same place etc).

The second Escort takes the last Neophyte by the arm and ascertains that the others follow, intervening kindly but firmly if necessary. (Members must be adequately briefed before entering.)

Escorts must take care that they place the Neophytes correctly and in a harmonious way in front of the Stations.

5) Presentation of the Talar

It is the Master of Ceremonies who hands over the Talars to the Escorts, who in turn will help the Neophytes to put them on.

6) End of the Ceremony

When the Master of Ritual says: “Thus ends our work of this day. Vestal before leaving, go and return the profane light to ... etc”, the Escorts must separate the new Brothers of the Parvis into two groups: one is led to the South, the other to the North, leaving a passage for the Vestal and the Master Ritual.

7) Exit

The Escorts and the new Brothers of the Parvis again grouped together, will leave the room last (following the Dignitaries and the Members) in a clockwise order. In front of the Shekinah, facing East, they all bow together in a straight line.

PROTOCOL FOR ENTRY

- Members wait in the Antechamber of the Temple.
- The Guardian and the Master of Ceremonies are inside the Temple.
- The Guardian strikes the gong 3 times and calls in the members who, after bowing in front of the Shekinah, will go to their respective places (always going in a clockwise direction).
- The Neophytes wait in the Antechamber with their Escorts.
- Simultaneously, the Master of Ceremonies will put on (rather loudly) the Toccata by Bach or the Overture of the “Nuremberg Master Singers” by Wagner and will ascertain that harmony reigns and that everyone is in the right place.
- The members are standing, arms crossed in the Sign of Supplication

- When all members are inside, the Guardian will call in the Dignitaries in the following order, while striking the gong for each of them:
- The Watcher (he bows in front of the Shekinah and goes to the North Station).
- The Matre (she bows in front of the Shekinah and goes to the West Station).
- The Chaplain (he bows in front of the Shekinah and goes to the South Station).
- The Vestal enters carrying the Sacred Flame held high in both hands and places it on the Shekinah (between the candelabrum and the base of the Triangle), then goes to her place and puts incense on the already burning coal.
- The Master of Ritual enters after the Vestal.
- The Master of Ceremonies turns down the music and then turns it off.

THE CEREMONY

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Guardian, strike the gong 3 times to declare the opening of our work of this day.

The Guardian strikes the gong 3 times quite strongly.

The Master of Ritual either says a short prayer or makes an invocation to put Members in Unity and Harmony.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Vestal, go accomplish your secular duties and cense the 4 Stations of our Temple as well as our Sacred Shekinah.

Light the 3 Flames which symbolize LIFE, LIGHT and LOVE, manifested in our Lodge.

The Master of Ceremonies puts on the music—the Paradisium by Gabriel Fauré (conducted by Michel Corboz).

The Vestal censes the Stations (East—South—West—North) 7 times, then the Shekinah at the point West. She then puts down the censer and goes back to her place to the right of the Master of Ritual.

At the end of the Paradisium, the Master of Ceremonies will turn off the music.

The Neophyte(s) to be initiated will be waiting in the Antechamber and the Escorts now knock at the door.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Who knocks at the Door of the Temple at this hour?

GUARDIAN:

Venerable Master, it is a Soul inspired by God, seeking a greater Light and asking permission to be received in our Sacred Circle in order to be vested with the Consciousness and necessary Force to wear with dignity the Emblem of Purity and Unity of our Sacred Order.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

It is well, Guardian. Before introducing him² into this Sanctuary, make sure that he is an active and regular member of our Templar Confraternity.

GUARDIAN:

Venerable Master. I can assure you that the Soul waiting in the Antechamber of the Temple is a sincere seeker, and a regular member of our Sacred Order.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Since you find him worthy to enter into our Sacred Circle and to be confirmed into our Templar Confraternity, I entrust you with the full responsibility of escorting him to us at this Station in the East of our Temple where I am waiting to welcome him.

GUARDIAN:

So be it, Venerable Master.

As the Neophyte(s), led by the Escorts enter the Temple, the Guardian checks that their heads and faces are covered with the black veil so that they may not see anything. They are led in and placed facing the East Station.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Dear Brother(s)/sister(s), Brothers and Sisters

At this Station which symbolizes the Great Light
 rising in the East,
 bringing Heat and Life to our planet,
 In the name of our Sacred Order ...

2 The text is to be put in the feminine or the plural as necessary.

I welcome you.

Human Will must be the reflection of Divine Power.

All Creation is a function of Will.

But Knowledge remains hidden to ordinary men and to impostors and is expressed through symbol and allegory so that it may not be used for personal and selfish purposes.

At midpoint between Spirit and Matter, Man must struggle to gain more Light, to win the Absolute, and nothing can stop him if he carries Truth in his Heart, and Righteousness in his soul.

Therefore, I must first tell you that in order to work successfully on natural and supernatural philosophy, man must first of all build a Divine Temple in his heart.

A short moment of silence.

Let us now be united in this invocation:

(Free invocation) and a short moment of silence.

MAY THE COSMIC PEACE BE WITH US.

And now, (..... *name*)

In order to become a true Templar in the Service of Christ,

You must seek by all possible means

To be regenerated physically and morally.

At this Station,

I will now ask you if you are still determined to continue on the Path which leads to the Light?

The Neophyte(s) must reply clearly and audibly.

I give you my blessing

so that you may continue your way leading to the SOUTH Station of our Temple, where our Chaplain awaits you.

Make the sign of the Cross.

Escorts please lead x..... to the SOUTH Station of our Temple.

The Escorts turn the Neophyte(s) around and conduct them to the South Station.

CHAPLAIN:

I greet you, x.....

Your sincere and faithful quest

has led you to this Station

to the zenith,

where I welcome you with the fraternal bonds uniting us.

The Initiate, the Fulfilled Man,

The True Templar of Christ,

is seated between the two Pillars of the Temple.

The one at the right representing Law and Mercy,

the one at the left, Freedom and Rigour.

His Faith is the Science of the RIGHTEOUS

and his creativity is the sole link

between the absolute being and the relative being;

that is: between the Infinite and the Finite.

Thus we can say that

Beauty is the Splendour of TRUTH.

The Templar,

prostrate before the Sacred Cosmic Law,

must learn to express within himself

ACTIVITY and RECEPTIVITY,

the two balancing forces of the manifested world.

At this Station,

I bless you in the name of the Blessed Trinity

and the Force of the Templar Cross.

... sign of the Cross.

I encourage you to continue your way to the WEST

Station of our Temple where our Matre awaits you.

But before you leave this Station,

remember that destiny gently helps

on their way those who accept,

but puts to the test and treats harshly those who refuse.

Therefore, x.....

are you ready to calmly endure the Fire of the ordeals which will free you from the whims and impulses of the ego?

The Neophyte(s) must reply clearly and audibly.

Escorts, please lead x..... to the WEST Station of our Temple.

The Escorts take the Neophyte(s) and place them facing the West Station.

MATRE:

x.....

At this WEST Station,

May my peace of the evening receive and keep you,
giving you some respite while I,
the Matre,
Enrich your quest for the Light.

Opposite the Sun, I am the Moon,

I am the Mother, fertilizing the seeds
sown in the Earth,
so that the New Man may be born in you.

In this evening peace, let the Divine forces work in you,
through the Alliance and the Marriage of the opposites,
of Fire and Water, and your two natures.

You, who wish to become Master of yourself,

must first tame your ego
and enter into true World Service,
where man is kept in contact with the High Hierarchies
And is pledged to the Service of our Planet and its evolution.

To do so, know that the Royal Path of Christ demands that you learn:

1. never to do what your ego desires;
2. to submit yourself to a strict discipline and an absolute obedience to the Great Cosmic Laws, even if you are not yet conscious of the profound reason;
3. if you are sleepy, learn to stay awake;
4. if you are hungry, learn to fast;
5. if you are tired, work.

Such is the human route which will take you to Absolute Truth,
to Eternal Consciousness.

Our best example is Jesus
who went through the crucifixion,
symbolizing for us the death of the lower self,
so that the Christ-Consciousness might find a loftier expression.

Such is LIFE ... Such is the LAW.

Work without respite and remember
that it is only through working
and helping others
every day of your life,
with all your strength, with all your power,
that you can conquer the Great Light,
symbolized by the Celestial Jerusalem;
in this way
you will be working for yourself.

Everything that you will have done
with your heart and with joy,
will be returned to you a hundredfold.

Work ... Meditate ... Pray.

Are you ready to arm yourself with courage, perseverance, love and joy,
to put yourself unremittingly at the service of the Christ Light?

The Neophyte(s) must reply clearly and audibly.

Before reaching the end of this celestial journey,
let me bless you
and give you
all the Love of the Mother.

Make the sign of the Cross.

May this Love warm and accompany you to the NORTH Station of our Temple,
where our Watcher awaits you.

Escorts please lead x..... to the NORTH Station of Our Temple.

The Escorts take the Neophyte(s) to the North Station.

WATCHER:

Are you still determined to pursue your journey and seek what lies hidden behind appearances?

The Neophyte(s) must reply clearly and audibly.

Now fear not.

Beyond the darkness of the North,
lies the Fire of the Spirit.

I am here to receive you and instruct you
until you are taken again to the East
where, once more, the Great Manifested Light
will shine forth.

But before that, allow me
to welcome you at this Station
And give you my blessing.

... sign of the Cross.

Life in the Cosmos
follows rhythmic pulsations,
comparable to the alternation of inhaling and
exhaling,
day and night, summer and winter,
life and death.

Death is the same for us all.
It is how we leave Life that makes the difference.

But always remember
that Death is an illusion.
In fact,
it is only another aspect of Life.

At this Station, let me tell you
that you must also consider Life
as ephemeral as smoke passing by,
or a cloud drifting overhead,
and all its glory
is like a flower in the meadow
which unfolds in the morning and dies at eventide.

In the world of illusions,

all must pass away.

Everyone must one day confront
the great problem or death
which alone gives meaning to Life.
You must be able to die to the profane world
in order to be born again to the Cosmic World.

Therefore, let the quality and the wholeness of Life
compensate for its shortness.
You, wishing to be a Knight of the Temple,
do not think of living a long time,
but rather of living according to Cosmic Good.

And since nothing is more uncertain
than the hour of Death ...
prepare yourself each day to be FREE
to leave this Earth
and to continue your evolution
on a parallel Invisible plane,
free from all human and terrestrial chains
which keep you prisoner of yourself.

Then, you will become a CHRISTOPHER,
he who bears the Christ.

Your Escorts will soon take you back to the EAST Station,
but before leaving the North,
remember
that it is at the darkest hour of the night
that a new dawn appears ...
May this Hope be ever present within you.

Escorts, please lead x..... to the EAST Station,
where the Light of Dawn
will rise again and shine forth.

The Escorts lead the Neophyte(s) to the East Station.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Beloved x.....
We have now come to the most moving
and solemn moment of our ritual.

Remain calm and collected
for the moment of purification is at hand.

Let us be united with the Chaplain during his invocation.
Chaplain, please prepare our hearts for purification with a prayer.

CHAPLAIN:

God of our Hearts,
let thy Divine Vibrations
penetrate this Sacred Place.
Harmonize us with thy Divine Cosmic Spirit
and make us receptive to the teachings and inspirations
we are to receive, here, in this Temple.

May this Temple forever be
a source of Light, Life, Love, and Peace for us.

May it be a constant Source of inspiration
for all the efforts we make,
individually and collectively.

So BE IT.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Chaplain, I thank you.

On the threshold of Aquarius,
We must leave the lunar phase and enter the solar phase
which was manifested through the Christ.

This means that
in our personal growth,
we must transmute our human instincts
into Cosmic Consciousness.

This is abnegation of self
for the good of the True Being.

And above all,
remember that it is Love that comes the closest
to Cosmic Energy.
It is the Sun of the Soul
and the Great Mystery of Life.

Love is the Return to UNITY.

Our Being is free when it is conscious,
our Being is conscious when it is determined
to grow and to open to Universal Consciousness.

To conclude,
I must tell you,
seeker of the Light:

- The Light is a Sacred fire which Nature has put at the service of Will;
- It illuminates strong souls and strikes down the others;
- Pay heed to your actions, your speech and your thoughts;
- Only do and say that which your consciousness and heart approve;
- The Inner Light is the only conquest that man must make if he wishes to serve God, Life and his Fellowman.

Beloved x.....

The moment has come for you to humbly and
sincerely ask
For the purification of your bodies.

I repeat:

Increase your efforts to purify yourself,
To purify yourself always and forever,
Not through mortifications, deprivations and imposed penance ...
For it is not your body, but your Soul and Heart that must be purified.

The Talar,

The White Robe of Monks,
symbolizes Purity, Unity, Force
and the Choice of Light and Knowledge
rather than Darkness,
Ignorance
and the forces of Separativity.
Its whiteness expresses readiness to serve
and the submission of the Ego.
It indicates also the first steps of the Soul of the
man, who,
in renouncing the hold of the human condition
is born again into the Divine Being.

This is the symbol of the Talar,
 the white Robe with which you will be clothed
 in a few moments.

Vestal, go and cense our Brother(s) and Sister(s) Neophyte(s), making a circle
 around them 3 times in order to purify their bodies (physical—soul—spirit)
 and to protect them.

Man
 having been morally and physically regenerated,
 regains the Great Power,
 which he forfeited through his loss of innocence.

This Power
 gives him spiritual insight
 and he will recognize
 that the physical clothing of all mortals
 dedicated to God
 must be the Talar,
 like those not yet consecrated displayed before us,
 and which, through the ages,
 Men and women dedicated to God and the Cosmos
 have worn.

But if the actual clothing itself
 is sufficient for the ordinary man,
 this must not be the case for us, Templars.
 In order for the Talar to be perfect
 and to become sacred,
 it must be consecrated by the Spiritual Masters,
 intermediary between God and us
 and whom I humbly represent here
 in this Temple.

Bow, kneel down on your right knee
 and take the following oath.

*The Master of Ceremonies invites each Neophyte to read and sign the oath. A pen
 must be on hand for the signing of the oath.*

*The oath must be signed on a Bible which is opened at the Gospel of St John, or
 on another Sacred Book held by the Master of Ceremonies or a Knight.*

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Masters who dwell in the Invisible,
 I beseech you from my innermost heart,
 to assist me and to allow me to make use
 of the Powers with which my function has invested me,
 humbly and without breaking the Great Law.

Beloved x..... ,
 the moment has come for you
 to purify yourself, casting off
 all impurities, all habits and
 all the human conditions
 which keep you prisoner
 of the material world.

Symbolically, rid yourself of these
 by taking off your worldly clothes.

The Master of Ritual invites the 2 Escorts to take off the Neophytes' clothes, leaving only their underwear.

The Master of Ceremonies lifts the black veil off the head(s) of the Neophyte(s).

At the same time, the Master of Ritual consecrates each Talar with a sign of the Cross.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

My Brother/Sister,
 receive this Celestial Robe,
 Symbol of Purity, Unity and Force.

Now that you have been raised to the grade of
 Brother of the Parvis,
 always remain worthy
 of wearing this Sacred Robe
 whatever may happen,
 even if your physical life is in danger,
 for you will soon learn
 that physical life is of no importance.

Simultaneously, the Master of Ceremonies gives the Talars to the Escorts, who pass them on to the Aspirants.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Master of Ceremonies, as our newly received Brothers of the Parvis are attending a Templar Ceremony for the first time, would you acquaint them with the symbols of the objects around us and explain their meaning. But first, let me recommend, Brothers and Sisters, that you do not try to retain everything but just allow yourself to be imbued with the essence of what is being said.

The Master of ceremonies comes forward and reads.

MASTER OF CEREMONIES:

THE TEMPLAR CROSS is red. By its vertical branch, it forms a link through Spirit between Heaven and the Earth; by its horizontal branch it enables the manifestation of Spirit into form. For the Templars, there is no supremacy of one over the other, but a perfect and complementary Balance of Spirit and Matter. The Templar Cross is a *pattee* cross so as to receive at its points (its indented ends, the grail cups) the Celestial and Terrestrial Energies, to unite them and to bring them to perfection at its center, then send them out through its points with discernment to the world.

THE SWORD: if, for many it is synonymous with bloody battle, for us, **TEMPLARS**, it is our Strength, our Courage and the symbol of our inner Fight to master our primary nature, but especially to incarnate the Word in all its Justice and its Truth. Symbol of Creative Peace, it activates the Celestial Light and enables the liberation of the Divine Being through Knowledge. The Noble Knight carries within him a vertical Sword of Light which keeps him within the **LAW** of the Lord and renders His manifestation possible.

THE RED ROSE is the rose of Love for all. In the Temple and for the Mystic, the Red Rose, like the blood—vehicle of the soul—is synonymous with Perfection, transmutation and the perfect Realization of the Being. The Eternal and Immortal Rose bursts forth, comes into full bloom in the center of the Cross and radiates out Universal Love, **LIFE**, and Cosmic Consciousness through the Heart,

THE THREE-BRANCHED CANDELABRUM: Universal Light of the Worlds, representing Life and Salvation. Its three lighted Flames reinforce during the Ritual the manifestation here and now of **LIFE**, **LIGHT**, and **LOVE**. It also symbolizes our Adhesion, our Obedience, and our Consecration to the Great Universal Principles.

THE BIBLE (*or other Sacred Book recognized by the Aspirant*): it would not be enough to say that the Sacred Book is the Symbol of Divine Science and Wisdom. It is also the Symbol of the Universe, of Revelation through the

Word and the Divine Message of Cosmic Order. Similarly, in the Quest for the Holy Grail it is the symbol of the Supreme Search that has become accessible to common mortals and where the Christ, through Jesus, shows us the Way and opens the Door.

THE RED VOTIVE CANDLE: Divine Presence in the midst of men, reminds us that the Fire of the Spirit abides in the heart of each atom of matter. Symbol of Purification, Illumination and Love, it is the likeness of Spirit and Transcendence.

THE INCENSE raises prayer to Heaven and heightens the perception of consciousness by purifying and etherealizing the air. It associates man to Divinity, the Finite to the Infinite, the mortal to the Immortal and seals the Covenants.

THE CLOAK of the Knight is adorned with the Cross of the Temple; by putting himself under the yoke of the Cross and all that it symbolizes, the Knight works voluntarily and totally in the Service of the Temple and the Christ in Glory; he institutes within himself the preponderance of Spirit over Matter and commits himself to placing Service for Glory of the Father before profane requirements. If the Noble Knight of the Temple still wears the White Mantle, it is to affirm his retreat into himself and into God, his non-identification with the profane world and its temptations as well as his renouncement of material instinct, attesting thereby to the Continuity of the Templar Tradition. By donning the White Mantle of invincibility, invisibility, forgetfulness of self and of metamorphosis, the Noble Knight reinforces his choice for Wisdom and assumes his responsibilities and functions in the worthy Service of the Temple.

THE BEAUCEANT, Banner of the Temple, represents the Mercy and Rigour of the columns supporting its Pediment. It creates a link between Heaven and Earth and symbolizes the victory of the RESURRECTED GLORIOUS CHRIST. It protects our Egregore by the power of its symbols, because all mystical Symbols are Forces in movement and action-bearing currents of Energy and Consciousness.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Thank you, Master of Ceremonies.

Brothers and Sisters, let us meditate for a few minutes and allow the power of the symbols we have just evoked to act within us

One minute of silence.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Brothers and Sisters, by the Oath you have just taken, you have now become Full Brothers and Sisters of the Temple. The Cross which I am now going to give you, Sacred Emblem of our Venerable Order, is its symbol and guarantor. It has been blessed by an Official Priest, Member of the Order, during a special sacred ceremony, and you should wear it at each meeting, Ceremony or Gathering of the Order.

The Master of Ceremonies turns the music up louder and comes back with the Crosses. The Master of Ritual steps forward and puts the Cross around the neck of each new Brother of the Parvis and gives the traditional Templar embrace in the name of all his Brothers and Sisters.

The Master of Ritual and the Master of Ceremonies return to their places.

MASTER OF RITUAL:

Brothers and Sisters,
 let us be silent for a few minutes and thank Divine consciousness
 and the Invisible Masters
 for their assistance and guidance
 during this Sacred Ceremony.

A short moment of meditation.

United in Love
 and the unifying current among us,
 let us now recite our Templar Psalm:

NON NOBIS DOMINE NON NOBIS
 SED NOMINI TUO DA GLORIAM (3 times)

NOT FOR US, LORD, NOT FOR US
 BUT TO THY NAME GIVE GLORY.

Thus ends our Work of this day.

Vestal, before leaving, go and return the profane Light to the profane world so that the True Light may shine forever in our Hearts.

The Vestal puts out the 3 candles, one after the other starting at the right, then the Sacred Flame, and each Dignitary puts out his candle at the same time.

The Master of Ritual leaves the room to the sound of a Hallelujah (of one's choice), having bowed before the Shekinah.

He is followed by the Vestal, the Chaplain, the Matre, then the Members (all must bow in front of the Shekinah before leaving).

The Guardian strikes the gong 3 times when the Master of Ritual leaves the room and once for each dignitary to leave the room.

The Master of Ceremonies is responsible for putting the Temple in order and for returning the copies of the text of the Ceremony to the officer in charge of the Archives.

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