The Masonic Degree of Rose-Croix and Christianity: The Complex Links between Religion and Freemasonry during the Enlightenment

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Taking shape starting in 1717, speculative, modern Freemasonry originally practiced the two degrees inherited from operative masonry: "entered apprentice" and "fellow craft"; added to these, in the 1730s, was a third degree called "master." Between then and the 1760s, Freemasons would discover and go about practicing "other degrees." As customary usage has had it, the "other degrees" go by names that are inexact in a literal sense, but now established: "high degrees" or "Scottish degrees." These other degrees were the means by which Freemasonry was to incorporate parts of the the symbolic Western corpus, and would be one of the privileged forms of expression of the esoteric and Illuminist currents of the century of the Enlightenment. In the second part of the 18th century, the degree of the Knight Rose-Croix would become one of the most esteemed and most practiced of these upper degrees. So, this Masonic ritual raises particularly interesting questions for the historian of ideas about the complex links between Freemasonry and religion.

I. A Masonic Christian Degree during the Century of the Enlightenment

If the transcription of a document updated by Gustave Bord is to be believed—though it seems to be missing now—the first attestation of the existence of the degree of the "Chevalier Rose-Croix" goes back to the year 1757 and takes place in France. There is a Masonic diploma delivered to Brother Targe by the lodge *Enfants de la Sagesse et Concorde* [*Children of Wisdom and Concord*] on April 9, 1757. One of the signatories, Brother Itéguiemme, follows his paraph with his Masonic attributes: "*ex-maître, substitut A.S.P. Chev. de l'Orient et de Rose-Croix*."[1] The second oldest evidence of this degree's existence is the renowned letter that the Masons of Metz (France) wrote to those in Lyon (France) in June 1761. The object of this valuable message[2] was to exchange information between the order's dignitaries about the degrees known or practiced in the two cities. There it was discovered that the last of the 25 degrees of the Lyon brothers was the "*Chevalier de l'Aigle, du Pélican, Cher de St André ou maçon d'Heredon*" ["Knight of the Eagle, of the Pelican, Knt of Saint Andrew or Mason of Heredon"] another classic name for the Knight Rose-Croix. It must be not-

[1] Gustave Bord, *La Franc-Maçonnerie en France des origines à 1815*, Paris, 1908, reprint Slatkine, Geneva-Paris, 1985, p. 538.

[2] Transcribed in: Steel-Maret, *Archives Secrètes de la Franc-Maçonnerie*, reprint Slatkine, Geneva-Paris, 1985, 72-78.

ed that the Masons of Metz knew nothing whatsoever about this degree.

Masonic rituals from the 18th century with dates are extremely rare. By chance, for the degree of Rose-Croix we have two manuscripts at our disposal bearing dates, 1763 and 1765, which we have no reason to cast doubt upon. The rituals that they offer are moreover widely similar, as is the set of Rose-Croix rituals that can be attributed to the years 1760—1770. Upon reading these texts, the deeply Christian nature of the degree is clearly apparent. The ceremony of the Sovereign Chapter of Rose-Croix successively unfolds in several symbolic places:

> *"The first apartment represents Mount Calvary. It will be covered in black and illuminated by 33 stars"* [3]

> *"The 2nd represents the tomb and the moment of the Resurrection of J.C. It must be decorated as grandly as possible. The wall-covering must be striking, without any human figure [...] on the altar, which is well decorated. Jesus C. is represented there leaving the tomb, triumphant."* [4]

The Chapter's undertakings open out toward:

> *"The instant when the Temple veil ripped, when Shadows and dismay spread over the Earth, when the light grew dark, when the tools of Masonry broke, when the blazing star disappeared, when the cubic stone sweat blood and water, and when the word was lost."*

Then the Wise Master (this is the president's title) makes the following invitation:

> *"My brothers, since Masonry is feeling such disgrace, let us give our full attention to new endeavors in order to rediscover the word."* [5]

The candidate to the degree of Rose-Croix does not have marvelous new secrets offered to him right away. He is simply invited to take part in the efforts of disabled knights. The latter group indeed set off seeking "*through one new law to rediscover that word*"[6] that will reestablish order and harmony in the world. At first, the candidate is invited to travel, symbolically, for 33 years. During these peregrinations, he will discover 3 virtues: Faith, Hope, and Charity, which are presented to him as the new foundations of the Order; he is invited to "notice the beauties of this new law."[7]

With serenity restored by these first encouraging discoveries, the candidate is prompted to undertake his quest. He is next led "*into the darkest place where the word must emerge triumphant. [Then] the fruit of his search secures the lost word [for him].*"[8] This word is revealed to be "*I.N.R.I. or Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews*,"[9] "*the password is Emmanuel.*"[10] Once the reception is brought to an end, the works of the chapter are closed at the

> *"…moment when the word is rediscovered; when the cubic stone is changed into mystic rose, when the blazing star reappears with*

[3] *Document : un rituel du degré de Rose-Croix daté de 1765*, in *Renaissance Traditionnelle*, année 1971 (n°5, 6 et 7) 73. It is a transcription of manuscript MS 23191, preserved in the archives of the Historical Library [Bibliothèque Historique] of the City of Paris.

[4] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 75-76.

[5] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 156.

[6] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 158.

[7] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 159.

[8] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 162.

[9] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 164.

[10] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 165.

more splendor; when our tools have regained their forms, when the light is returned with greater radiance, when the darkness is dispersed and when the new law must reign among us and in the labors of perfect masonry."[11]

And then, after this is an agape ritual called "Communion Supper" [*Cène*].[12] Around a table covered with a white cloth, the brethren share bread and wine; there are at times along with this, a roasted lamb whose remains will be burned. There must be nothing there but one bread that will be broken; and the brothers must all drink wine from the same cup. For no doubt to remain about the nature of this ceremony, the ritual specifies that it is

"…a commemoration of Easter and the appearance of J.C. to his disciples in Emmaus."[13]

The set of ceremonies and ritual mechanism of the degree of Sovereign Prince Rose-Croix are therefore performed

"…to render allegorically what took place upon the death and upon the resurrection of J.C."[14]

So therefore:

"The Perfect Mason [...] is the allegory of the redeemer; this is why it is demanded that all subjects be Christian. The other [degrees] can be given to People who know the old Temple; but the latter can only be given to [those] who are subjected to the new law.[...] The principal feast is Holy Thursday."[15]

So it is no surprise to learn that the Rose-Croix ritual of the Marquis de Gages specifies that "*he takes the title of Christian Knight*."[16]

The profoundly Christian character of the Rose-Croix is all the more important because the degree is presented as the last of the Order, the culmination, the *Nec plus Ultra* of Masonry. This was the case in Lyon in 1761. This is what emerges both from the manuscript of the Marquis de Gages in 1763 as well as from some letters in 1766 from the Comte de Clermont. They are signed "*Your brother Clermont, Rose Croix parfait Maçon*."[17] The Grand Master of French Freemasonry, moreover, shows his great interest in this eminent degree. Here he congratulates the Senior Warden of the lodge of the Marquis de Gages, his correspondent, who

"…humiliated a very respectable visitor, from the Lodge of the House of the King [la Loge de la Maison du Roy], about all the degrees that he possessed, and refused him the title of Rose-Croix."

The Christian nature of the Rose-Croix degree was emphasized from the 18th century onwards.

Thus, in 1766, in his book "*L'Etoile Flamboyante*" ["*The Blazing Star*"] the Baron de Tschoudy writes:

"The Rose-Croix properly speaking, or Maçon d'Heredon, although, all things considered, this is only a renewed Masonry, or Catholicism put into degrees." [18]

[11] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 240.

[12] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 247.

[13] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 241.

[14] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 75.

[15] Transcript. cit. , R.T. 1971, 68.

[16] BN FM4 79, f°101 verso.

[17] F. Clément, *Contribution à l'Etude des Hauts-Degrees de la Francs-Maçonnerie et particulièrement à l'Histoire du Rite Ecossais Ancien et Accepté en Belgique*, Edition du Sup. Cons. de Belgique, Brussels, 1937. Chap. III, the letters from Grand-Master Clermont are 34-42.

[18] [Théodore de Tschoudy], *L'Etoile Flamboyante ou la société des Francs-Maçons considérée sous tous les aspects*, à l'Orient, Chez le silence [1766], 149.

Tschoudy returns to this point with several additional details in the secret instruction that he composed for *Les Maîtres Ecossais de Saint-André d'Ecosse*:

> *"The Rose-Croix, in other words Masonry renewed, is nothing other than the Catholic Religion put into degrees. In that respect, it is nevertheless more august in that it depicts objects that are more real, more sacred, more precious; and by combining in one and the same group the consoling mysteries of the Faith & the axioms necessary for salvation, it seems to consecrate the era of those times of grace when our ancestors, sons or nephews of the first Masons, Workers of the first Temple, opened their eyes to the truth, and renounced the prestige of the ancient law to follow the rites of the new, by embracing Christianity during the First Crusade."*[19]

In the early 1780s, the Grand Orient of France entrusted a "Chamber of Degrees" with the task of studying high degrees. On August 20, 1782, the brothers came together to examine the degree of Chevalier Rose-Croix.

> *"The Rf. Dejunquières read the degree entitled Chevalier de l'Aigle - Rose Croix. The chamber judged this degree to have too many Ceremonies in line with ecclesiastical ceremonies and judged that it could not be preserved. It was consequently rejected."*[20]

In the final third of the 18th century, the Rose-Croix would become accepted as the terminal degree of Masonry. After hesitation, the team constituting the Grand Chapter General of France would make it the culmination of the four orders, and the rallying of the majority of the chapters to the system adopted by the Grand Orient would therefore contribute to reinforcing the Rose-Croix' eminent position. During the Enlightenment, the Christian nature of the Rose-Croix seems universally admitted. But what Christianity is it a part of? How do we determine, in the vast continent of Judeo-Christian tradition, the Christian current in which this Masonic degree has its roots?

II. What Christianity for the Chevalier Rose-Croix?

To try to respond to these questions, it is appropriate to examine the ritual's principal sequences in view of the theological conceptions of different schools whose positions have been determined by the controversies that have occupied such a major place in the history of Western Christianity. We are indeed aware of the difficulty of such an undertaking, of the limits and of the necessarily elementary character of the analyses that we are offering, but, as a first step, it means sketching out some hypotheses and opening some workable avenues. Upon ending this journey through the Chevaliers Rose-Croix' abundantly rich ritual, one fact will become obvious: in a century exhausted by theological quarrels—first between Protestants and Catholics, then between "Romans" and Jansenists—the Rose-Croix chapter is the locus of an unheard-of undertaking: restoring primitive worship.

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[19] [Théodore de Tschoudy], *Ecossois de Saint-André d'Ecosse contenant le développement de l'Art Royal de la Franc-Maçonnerie, & le but direct, essentiel & primitif de son institution...* , in Paris, chez le frère La Vérité, au Grand Globe Français, 1780, 67.
In question are manuscripts from Tschoudy published by Labady close to 15 years after the death of the Baron.

[20] Registre de la Chambre des Degrees, BN FM1 56, f°27.

A. The Theological Virtues

The reception ceremony for the degree of Rose-Croix opens with peregrinations that lead the recipient to discover faith, hope, and charity, or the three theological virtues of the Christian tradition. He is invited to meditate on these virtues that are—he is told—the three pillars of a new law. Etymologically—Theo and Logos— the theological virtues are those that derive from the divine word. In the 18th century each person of course had in mind the classical theology by which everyone was sustained. Even if the force of Thomism had weakened over the course of the centuries, it remained one of the principal structures of Christian dogmatics. Moreover, this conception of the "virtues" had been in part forged by the medieval theology of the "angelic doctor." For Thomas Aquinas, a virtue was a habit that leads to the good. "Habit" must be read not in the everyday and banal sense that the word might have acquired today but in the sense, inherited from Aristotle of "disposition" or "tendency" such as, for example, in the expression "tendency of the spirit." Well within the systematic spirit of the philosophy of the Middle Ages, Thomas Aquinas distinguishes four cardinal or moral virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude as well as three theological virtues: " *Faith, hope, and charity are virtues directing us to God [...]I. II. 62 Beyond the virtues that help man to reach his natural end, there are other infused virtues that raise him to his supernatural end: these are theological virtues*[21] [*... They*] *place the intelligence and will of man in relation with supernatural happiness.*"[22] *Thus "Charity is a virtue, because it reaches God by uniting us with him.*"[23] If it is by will that man can acquire the moral virtues, on the other hand, his nature is powerless to obtain for him the theological virtues, nature being unable to lead to the supernatural that surpasses it: "*The moral virtues are given by nature [...] the theological virtues, on the contrary, do not come from nature, but from an external principle.*"[24] And so "*God gives the theological virtues by supernatural infusion.*"[25] It is therefore only by divine grace that man can acquire them; reprising Augustine, these are, Thomas Aquinas explains, "*[virtues] which God works in us without us.*"[26] At the end of their route, since this degree is the *Nec plus Ultra*, despite all their efforts—"confusion slipped into our works"—"the works" of the Masonic Knights are powerless to enable them to rediscover this lost word that will dissipate the Shadows. The new law that will set them on the way, the three virtues that unite with the divine logos, are infused in them by "grace." Analyzed by way of the religious ideas of the 18th century, through that primacy of grace, the ritual of the Rose-Croix clearly leans toward the Reformation (and Jansenism). The Rose-Croix chapter is therefore the locus where is represented "*allegorically what happened upon the death and the resurrection of J.C.*"—an event that, in the Christian tradition, surpasses histor-

[21] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Ia IIae*, qu. 62, art. 1. [(Translator's Version : tr. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, the Second and Revised Edition, 1920. …]

[22] Idem, art. 3.

[23] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, IIa IIae*, qu. 23, conclusion.

[24] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Ia, IIae*, qu. 63, art. 1.

[25] Idem, art. 3.

[26] Idem, art. 4. [see 21 for translator notes]

ic time— and where, under the gaze and by the "grace" of Christ on the cross, the recipient receives "*by divine infusion*" the three virtues by which he "reaches God by uniting us to him." The one who obtains a true knowledge of the three virtues therefore establishes a bridge between the Earth and Heaven...which is the exact definition of the priesthood.

B. The Imitation of Jesus Christ

Once perfected by the three theological virtues, the recipient must resume the quest for the lost word. For that, he is led "into the darkest place where the word must emerge triumphant." In question is the third level, "*destined to be the image of hell where there will be seven chandeliers bearing large, blazing flames and all the candle holders are heads of the dead and cross-bones. The walls must be covered with a painting of flames and human figures condemned to Hell, which inspires horror and hatred, with chains and people in chains.*"[27] As the ritual specifies, the symbolic passage of the candidate to the deepest abode of the dead is made "*in memory of the nocturnal and mystical journeys that J.[esus] C[hrist] made in the shadows, which lasted three days*."[28] "The descent of Christ into Hell"[29] between his death on the cross and his resurrection the third day is an essential figure of the doctrine of Christian salvation. It is by confronting the forces of Darkness in their kingdom that Jesus triumphs over them and thus delivers man from the anguish of death. This "nocturnal and mystical" visit of Christ to the Underworld may be shown to be particularly welcoming to esotericizing glosses. The Chevalier Rose-Croix is therefore invited to follow the Savior into the Underworld and through this "imitation of Jesus Christ" to also triumph over the horrors of death. It is as an after-result of this supreme test that the lost word will be revealed to him, the word that wrenches him out of the Underworld, disperses the darkness, and brings back the Light even brighter. This word is the name of Jesus, I.N.R.I., Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.

It is difficult to connect this sequence of the ritual to one doctrinal tendency or the other since "The Descent of Christ into the Underworld" is one of the fundamentals of Christianity. The theme appears to be more present in the Churches of the East where it has been the object of a bountiful iconography and numerous commentaries. Less commonly addressed in the Latin tradition, which is moreover peculiar, it nevertheless occupies a definite spot if only because of its position in the *Creed*. In any case, "through their identification with Christ in his passion, they [the Chevaliers Rose-Croix] attain a *priestly* status."[30]

Paradoxically—but the paradox is of course only apparent—this episode of "The Descent of Christ into the Underworld" is both a central figure of Christianity and, in the image of Orpheus, the very archetype of universal initiation that brings life back to a symbolic death in order to then ensure a rebirth leading to another quality of presence in the world. It is certainly one of the figures

[27] Description of the third apartment. Document: a ritual from the degree of Rose-Croix dated 1765, *op. cit*., 77.

[28] Document: a ritual from the degree of Rose-Croix dated 1765, *op. cit*., 162.

[29] See for example the commentaries of Thomas Aquinas, "The Descent of Christ into the Underworld" *Summa Theologica, IIIa*, qu. 52.

[30] Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire, *op. cit*., 207.

of Christianity that has the strongest initiatory dimension. It has, besides that, indubitable links with the mysteries of Antiquity.

C. The Communion Supper

Quite obviously, the agape of the Rose-Croix that follows the ceremony emerges as one of the ritual sequences to be analyzed in order to attribute inspiration of the degree to one current or another of Christianity and reflect on its priestly dimension. One can say right away that it would display in the context of Roman Catholicism a thoroughly blasphemous character. The eucharistic ceremony, or the holy sacrament since this is what is in question, can only be conducted by a priest within the framework of mass. Moreover, at the simple level of vocabulary, in a French context, the word Supper ["Cène" versus "Communion" for Roman Catholics] that is applied to it belongs unambiguously to the Protestant domain.[31] The sharing of bread and wine among all the Chevaliers Rose-Croix can also be compared with the Protestant Communion Supper, whereas in that era, in Catholic "communion", consuming the flesh and blood person of Christ was reserved for the priest alone. In their passionate debates, the Freemasons, gathered in Paris in 1785 in the *Convent des Philalèthes* had moreover stressed this: "*The Rose-Croix, above all, is remarkable for [...] its relation with an essential ceremony of Lutheran liturgy*."[32] Connecting the Rose-Croix degree with Lutheranism this way presents several difficulties, however. Of course, the rose and the cross are the main features of Luther's coat of arms. Granted, like all the currents of the Reformation, Lutheranism criticizes the priesthood's clerical monopoly and emphasizes the universal priesthood to which all men are called. However, on many points, the ambience that seems to emerge from the Supper of the Chevaliers Rose-Croix seems closer to Calvinism or to certain currents of the radical Reformation than to Lutheran positions. It is probably necessary moreover not to focus on the qualifier "Lutheran" used by the Philalethes. Luther being German and therefore foreign, we should probably see it, in the context of 18th century Paris, as simply a pejorative term in origin, which later came through use to refer to all Protestants.

The description of the Supper of the Chevaliers Rose-Croix is rather short. Can one, however, push the "theological" analysis of the ceremony further? Its very sobriety and the simplicity of its forms seem to exclude every idea of real presence. Moreover, no allusion is made to this. The Communion Supper is, the ritual specifies, "*a commemoration of Easter and the appearance of J.C. to his disciples in Emmaus.*"[33] There again, the words have their importance. Even beyond the debates—famous, if not known—on the real presence, on transubstantiation… situating the Communion Supper of the Rose-Croix in the realm of commemoration places it definitively in the wake of the Reformation and more particularly of Calvinism or the radical Reformation. One of the major controversies between Catholics and Calvinists in 16th- and 17th-century France

[31] For this "theological analysis of the Rose-Croix ritual, we extensively used André Gounelle's book, *La Cène, sacrement de la division*, Paris, Les Bergers et les Mages, 1996. The author manages the tour de force of presenting these, to say the least, austere controversies, in a clear, didactic, and interesting way!

[32] Charles Porset, *Les Philalèthes et les Convents de Paris, une politique de la folie,* Honoré Champion, Paris, 1996, Quatrième circulaire, début 1786, 478

[33] Document: a ritual from the degree of Rose-Croix dated 1765, *op. cit*., 241.

is the truly sacrificial dimension of the rite of sacrificing bread and wine. In the Catholic holy sacrament, the sacrifice of Jesus is renewed each time for the salvation of the world. For their part, Calvinists want to see it exclusively as commemoration—a very important one, granted—but fortunately only a memorial. In his beautiful work *Une sainte horreur* [*A Holy Terror*], Franck Lestringant studies the numerous cases of French Protestants who during the religious wars were to choose martyrdom rather than participate in a Catholic mass where God is once again put to death.[34]

In certain respects, the Supper of the Chevaliers Rose-Croix therefore appears quite inspired by Calvinist, or even radical, theology. Other aspects differentiate it nevertheless and forbid us from only seeing it as "Calvinism put into degrees," to paraphrase Tschoudy. First of all, if all Knights participate equally in the Supper, what is in question, nevertheless, is a secret ceremony. But the Calvinist Supper foregrounds the nature of community and the pedagogical testament that the ceremony must have. However, above all, the Supper of the Chevalier Rose-Croix is a silent ceremony whereas the Calvinist Communion Supper only has value as the Word's ritual support, that is to say as reading of and meditation on the Gospel. Practicing a rite without the Word is a heresy.

Taken by the priestly ambience of the ceremony, some Rose-Croix rituals leave silent allegory behind to clearly enter the realm of worship. Thus, in the rituals recently attributed to the Duke of Chartres, perhaps emerging from the leadership circles of the Grand Orient, one discovers, with surprise, an ostensibly liturgical formula: "*The Wise Master takes the bread, breaks off a piece, eats it saying: He took the bread, blessed it, broke it, ate some, and gave it to his disciples*"![35]

But if the Rose-Croix ceremony displays so many similarities with the Calvinist approach, might it not simply be because both are marked by a will to return to the practices of Ancient Christianity? Another sign of this will to archaism is the act of throwing the leftovers from agape into the fire: this is a direct borrowing from the practices of Jewish Passover.

D. The Utopia of Original Christianity.

The utopia of a return to the simple and authentic forms of original Christianity appears finally to be the project that has underpinned the setting-in-place and regulation of the degree of Rose-Croix. For lack of properly political debates in the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, public space was enlivened, to say nothing of being torn apart, by religious controversies, first between Catholics and Protestants, then between Roman and Jansenist Catholics. To support their positions and show their traditional orthodoxy, Protestants, then Jansenists, those contesting Roman authority, would constantly refer to the Original Church. The reference to ancient Christianity and to the original church was one of the major themes to haunt the religious consciousness of Enlightenment man. The beautiful *Histoire Ecclésiastique* by l'Abbé Fleury,[36] the great classic on the history of Christianity that was found in all good li-

[34] Frank Lestringant, *Une sainte horreur ou le voyage en Eucharistie XVIe – XVIIIe siècle*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1996.

[35] *Les rituels du duc de Chartres* (1784), s.l., Editions du Prieuré, 1997, 326.

[36] [L'Abbé] Fleury, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, Paris, chez Jean Mariette, 1691, particularly in the first two volumes.

braries, presents the first years of the young Christian community in idyllic terms; sincerity and simplicity are its principal traits. In a totally different register, Voltaire himself was a good witness to the sentiments of the upstanding man of the 18th century with regard to the first years of Christianity. At the complete opposite of his attacks against the pomp of the Roman hierarchy as well as against fanaticism and superstition, the patriarch of Fernet describes with emotion, in a style marked by sympathy for the "Original Church," how "the Christians, in early times, took no name other than that of brothers. They assembled and awaited the spirit."[37] As for worship, "the mass was very different [...] in the original church [...] from the time of the apostles, people would assemble in the evening to eat communion, the Lord's supper… (Paul to the Corinthians.[38]) [...] People abided in the breaking of bread…" (Acts, ii: 39) [...] The disciples [had come] together to break bread (Acts, xx 20[39])".[40]

This analytical framework appears all the more credible to us because the Masons of the Enlightenment seem to have been greatly interested in the Primitive Church. During the *Convent des Philalèthes*, brother Baron of Gleichen shows all the similarities between Masonic works and the customs of the "first Christians [who] celebrated their mysteries at night, which they would end like ours, with Agapes [...] it results from this opinion that Masonic science is the science of the true Christian religion, such as was observed by pious Gnostics."[41] And Brother de Paul adds: "To return man to the original religion, to the purity and simplicity of his worship, such is the essential nature of Mas.[onic] science."[42] In the same vein, Brother de Raimond declares that: "Mas.[onic] science is the symbol of the true, original religion."[43] This insistence on true religion leaves it of course understood that what one has before one's eyes is false or in any case quite corrupted. In the aftermath of the Convent's work, the Philalèthes would stress that "Several educated M.[asons] find almost identical relations between the generally adopted customs of the interior economy of the M.[asonic] Society, and those whose trace we find in the original Church."[44] The degree of Rose-Croix is certainly one of the most successful attempts to restore original worship and its priesthood.

What is often questioned is the name of Rose-Croix given to this degree. Indeed, the alchemy mobilized by the *Fama Fraternitatis* and the *Confessio* seems quite absent from the original rituals of the Masonic degree of Rose-Croix. But Roland Edighoffer[45] showed that for the author of

[37] Voltaire, *Œuvres complètes*, Tome XVIII, Dictionnaire philosophique, De la primitive Eglise et de ceux qui ont cru la rétablir, 536.

[38] Ist letter to the Corinthians, XI, 20, 33.

[39] Verse 7. [c.f. footnote 38]

[40] Voltaire, *Œuvres complètes*, Tome XIX, Fragment sur l'histoire générale (1773), Mélanges VIII, 270.

[41] Charles Porset, *op. cit.*, Quatrième Circulaire, proponenda IV, mars 1785, 325.

[42] Idem.

[43] Charles Porset, *op. cit*., 328.

[44] Charles Porset, *op. cit*., 478

[45] On this question, we will refer to his overview, Les Rose-Croix, Collection Que-sais-je?, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1986. More widely, on the links between the imagination of Rose-Croix and Freemasonry, we will also consult the chapter Les Rose-Croix en quête du christianisme primitif in Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire, op. cit..

the manifestos, the young pastor Johann Valentin, it was ultimately only a language and a symbol for defending a theological thesis: reticence before the constitution of a Lutheran orthodoxy and the defense of the spirit of the early Reformation. But under the veil of alchemical allegory, used to avoid the fulmination of the new Lutheran dignitaries, the *ludibrium* of the Rose-Croix would be first of all a plea for a return to the sources of Christianity. Also, not at the surface of things, but in their very substance, Masonic ritual is really inscribed in the true tradition of the Rose-Croix such as it appears at the beginning of the 17th century. In the middle of the 1780s, in the course of the debates of the Convents of Philalethes, the B. of Gleichen had it noted, on the topic of the customs of the first Christians, that "sacramental words were secrets: did not real sacramental words experience the fate of the master-word?"[46] True Masonic science therefore overlaps with the priestly art and thus aims to reestablish the true secrets of primitive worship. In the midst of the century of the Enlightenment, the shadow of Melchisedech hovers behind the closed doors of lodges.

[46] Charles Porset, op. cit., 322.