

# **Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica**

## **in Britannia**

### **History of the Gnostic Catholic Church**

#### **by T. Apiryon**

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## Jules Doinel and The Gnostic Church of France



Jules Doinel

The founder of the Gnostic Church was Jules-Benoît Stanislas Doinel du Val-Michel (1842-1903). Doinel was a librarian, a Grand Orient Freemason, an antiquarian and a practicing Spiritist. In his frequent attempts at communication with spirits, he was confronted with a recurring vision of Divine Femininity under various aspects. He gradually developed the conviction that his destiny involved his participation in the restoration of the feminine aspect of divinity to its proper place in religion.

In 1888, while working as archivist for the Library of Orléans, he discovered an original charter dated 1022 which had been written by Canon Stephan of Orléans, a school master and forerunner of the Cathars who taught gnostic doctrines. Stephan was burned later the same year for heresy.

Doinel became fascinated by the drama of the Cathars and their heroic and tragic resistance against the forces of the Pope. He began to study their doctrines and those of their predecessors, the Bogomils, the Paulicians, the Manichaeans and the Gnostics. As his studies progressed, he became increasingly convinced that Gnosticism was the true religion behind Freemasonry.

One night in 1888, the "Eon Jesus" appeared to Doinel in a vision and charged him with the work of establishing a new church. He spiritually consecrated Doinel as "Bishop of Montségur and Primate of the Albigenses". After his vision of the Eon Jesus, Doinel began attempting to contact Cathar and Gnostic spirits in seances in the salon of Maria de Mariategui, Lady Caithness, Duchesse de Medina Pomar.



Stanislas de Guaita

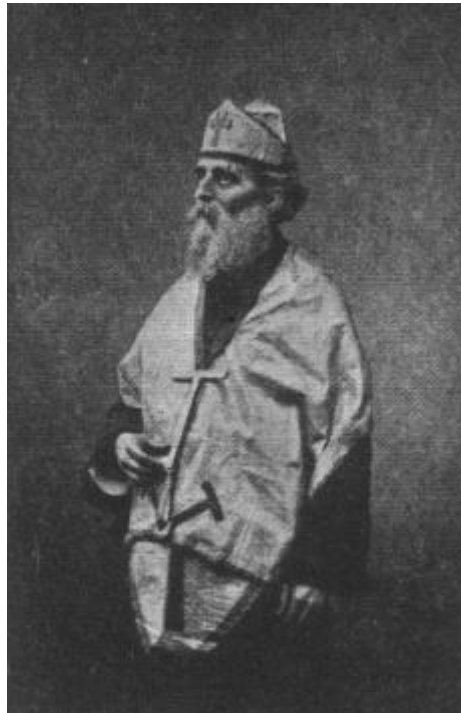
Doinel had long been associated with Lady Caithness, who was a prominent figure in the French Spiritist circles of the time, a disciple of Anna Kingsford and leader of the French branch of the Theosophical Society. She considered herself a reincarnation of Mary Stuart; and interestingly, a Spiritist communication in 1881 had foreshadowed to her a revolution in religion which would result in a "New Age of Our Lady of the Holy Spirit". Doinel's Gnostic seances were attended by other notable occultists of various sects, including the Abbé Roca, an Ex-Catholic Priest and close associate of Stanislas de Guaita and Oswald Wirth. Communications from the spirits were generally received by means of a pendulum suspended by Lady Caithness over a board of letters.

At one seance, Doinel received the following communication: I address myself to you because you are my friend, my servant and the prelate of my Albigensian Church. I am exiled from the Pleroma, and it is I whom Valentinus named Sophia-Achamôth. It is I whom Simon Magus called Helene-Ennoia; for I am the Eternal Androgyne. Jesus is the Word of God; I am the Thought of God. One day I shall remount to my Father, but I require aid in this; it requires the supplication of my Brother Jesus to intercede for me. Only the Infinite is able to redeem the Infinite, and only God is able to redeem God. Listen well: The *One* has brought forth *One*, then *One*. And the Three are but One: the Father, the Word and the Thought. Establish my Gnostic Church. The Demiurge will be powerless against it. Receive the Paraclete.

At other seances the Canon Stephan and one Guilhabert de Castres, Cathar Bishop of Toulouse in the 12th century, who was martyred at Montségur, were contacted. At another seance, in September of 1889, the "Very High Synod of Bishops of the Paraclete", consisting of 40 Cathar Bishops, manifested and gave their names, which were later checked against records in the National Library and proved to be accurate. The head of the Synod was Guilhabert de Castres, who addressed Doinel and instructed him to reconstitute and teach the gnostic doctrine by founding an Assembly of the Paraclete, to be called the Gnostic Church. Helene-Ennoia was to assist him, and they were to be spiritually wedded. The assembly was to be composed of Parfaits and Parfaites, and was to take for its holy book the Fourth Gospel, the Gospel of John. The church was to be administered by male

bishops and female "sophias", who were to be elected and consecrated according to the Gnostic Rite.

Doinel proclaimed the year 1890 as the beginning of the "Era of the Gnosis Restored". He assumed the office of Patriarch of the Gnostic Church under the mystic name of Valentin II, in homage to Valentinus, the 5th century founder of the Valentinian school of Gnosticism. He consecrated a number of bishops, all of whom chose a mystic name which was prefaced by the Greek letter Tau to represent the Greek Tau Cross or the Egyptian Ankh.



**Tau Synesius**

Among the first of the bishops and sophias consecrated by Doinel were: Gérard Encausse, also known as "Papus" (1865-1916), as Tau Vincent, Bishop of Toulouse (later in 1890, Doinel joined the Martinist Order of Papus and swiftly became a member of its Supreme Council); Paul Sédir (real name Yvon Le Loup, 1871-1926) as Tau Paul, coadjutor of Toulouse; Lucien Chamuel (real name Lucien Mauchel) as Tau Bardesane, Bishop of La Rochelle and Saintes; Louis-Sophrone Fugairon (b. 1846) as Tau Sophronius, Bishop of Béziers; Albert Jounet (1863-1923) as Tau Théodote, Bishop of Avignon; Marie Chauvel de Chauvigny (1842-1927) as Esclarmonde, Sophia of Varsovie; and Léonce-Eugène Joseph Fabre des Essarts (1848-1917) as Tau Synesius, Bishop of Bordeaux.

The Church consisted of three levels of membership: the high clergy, the low clergy, and the faithful. The high clergy consisted of male/female pairs of bishops and sophias, who were responsible for church administration. They were elected by their congregations and later confirmed in office with formal consecration by the patriarch. The low clergy consisted of pairs of deacons and deaconesses, who acted under the direction of the bishops and sophias, and were responsible for conducting the day-to-day church activities. The Faithful, or lay members of the Church, were referred to as Parfaits (male) and Parfaites (female),

designations which translate as "Perfect", and which derive from Catharism. However, in Doinel's church, the term "Perfect" was not understood in the Cathar sense as someone who had taken strict vows of asceticism, but was interpreted as including the two higher divisions of the Valentinian threefold classification of the human race: the *Pneumatics* and the *Psychics*; but excluding the lower division, the materialistic *Hylics*. Only individuals judged to be of high intelligence, refinement and open mind were admitted to Doinel's Gnostic Church.

Doinel's Gnostic Church combined the theological doctrines of Simon Magus, Valentinus and Marcus (a later Valentinian noted for his development of the mysteries of numbers and letters and of the "mystic marriage") with sacraments derived from the Cathar Church and conferred in rituals which were heavily influenced by those of the Roman Catholic Church. At the same time, the Gnostic Church was intended to present a system of mystical Masonry.

A Gnostic Mass, called the *Fraction du pain* or "Breaking of the Bread" was composed. The sacramental liturgy of the Church was completed by the inclusion of two Cathar sacraments, the *Consolamentum* and the *Appareillementum*.

## Leo Taxil

In 1881, a young anti-clericalist named Gabriel-Antoine Jogand-Page was made a Freemason. Within a year, he resigned from Masonry, converted to Catholicism, and began one of the most notorious propaganda campaigns in the history of Occultism. Under the pseudonym of Leo Taxil, Jogand published a number of books and articles in which he "proved" that Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism, Martinism and other similar organizations were utterly satanic in nature, and posed a dire threat to Christian European civilization. According to Taxil, all such organizations were secretly controlled by the mysterious "Order of the Palladium", a ruthless, terrible and extremely secretive body within the heart of Freemasonry which worshipped the Devil with inhuman rites and received commands directly from the Prince of Darkness himself. The Palladists were allegedly headed by Albert Pike, Sovereign Grand Commander of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, and a High Priestess named Diana Vaughan. Miss Vaughan, a direct descendant of the 17th century Rosicrucian and Alchemist Thomas Vaughan, had been corresponding with Taxil. Her heart had evidently been softened by one too many child sacrifices, and she had secretly written to Taxil to inquire about how she might be saved. Her correspondence also revealed many shocking secrets of the devilish world of the Masonic Inner Circle: luciferian symbolism contained in seemingly innocent emblems and phrases; gruesome human sacrifices and obscene phallic orgies conducted in hidden chambers of infernal worship carved beneath the Rock of Gibraltar; and terrifying conspiracies for world satanic domination.

Needless to say, Jogand / Taxil's works became quite popular. They rapidly gained him the notice and smug patronage of the Roman Catholic Church, and he even obtained an official audience with Pope Leo XIII in 1887.

Ultimately Miss Vaughan, by then world-famous, decided once and for all to renounce Satan and convert to Catholicism. The Church eagerly anticipated her public introduction, which Jogand/Taxil scheduled for 19th April 1897. To a lecture hall filled with Catholic Clergy and Freemasons, Jogand revealed that Diana Vaughan was none other than

his secretary, but that there was no point in introducing her, because she had never been a High Priestess of the Palladists. In fact, there had never been an Order of the Palladium. He, Gabriel Jogand, had fabricated the entire story as a monumental joke at the expense of the Church. He had remained a faithful anti-clericalist all along. The Masons present found this revelation intensely amusing. The Catholic clergy present did not. Fortunately for the proprietors of the lecture hall, the police were summoned before a full-scale riot had broken out.

Jogand's success had been due, primarily, to his journalistic flair and to the credibility he enjoyed as a result of his enormous erudition; however, another significant factor in his success was his shrewd recruitment of a number of strategic, and totally unwitting, collaborators.

## Doinel's Defection

In 1895, Jules Doinel suddenly abdicated as Patriarch of the Gnostic Church, resigned from his Masonic Lodge, and converted to Roman Catholicism. Under the pseudonym "Jean Kostka", he attacked the Gnostic Church, Masonry and Martinism in a book called *Lucifer Unmasked*. For the next two years, Doinel collaborated with Taxil in articles denouncing the organizations that were formerly so much a part of his life. "Lucifer Unmasked" itself was probably a collaborative effort; its style betrays Jogand / Taxil's hand.

Encausse remarked later that Doinel had lacked "the necessary scientific education to explain without trouble the marvels which the invisible world squandered on him". Therefore, Encausse theorized, Doinel faced a choice between conversion or madness; and, said Encausse, "Let us be thankful that the Patriarch of the Gnosis has chosen the first way."



Tau Jules

Doinel's defection was a devastating blow to the Gnostic Church, but it managed to survive. Interim control of the Church was assumed by the Synod of Bishops, and at a High Synod in 1896, they elected one of their bishops, Léonce-Eugène Fabre des Essarts, known as Tau Synesius, to succeed Doinel as patriarch.

Fabre des Essarts was a Parisian occultist, a Symbolist poet and a scholar of the Gnosis and Esoteric Christianity. He and another Gnostic Bishop, Louis-Sophrone Fugairon (Tau Sophronius), a physician who was also a scholar of the Cathars and the Knights Templar, entered into a collaborative relationship to continue the development of the Gnostic Church. Together they began to shift the emphasis of the teachings of the Gnostic Church away from Gnostic theology and towards a more general view of "occult science".

In 1899, two years after Leo Taxil had exposed his hoax, Doinel began to correspond with Fabre des Essarts. In 1900 he requested reconciliation with the Gnostic Church and readmission as a bishop. As his first act of consecration as Patriarch of the Gnostic Church, Fabre des Essarts reconsecrated his former patriarch as Tau Jules, Bishop of Alet and Mirepoix.



Jean Bricaud

In 1901, Fabre des Essarts consecrated twenty-year old Jean "Joanny" Bricaud (1881-1934) as Tau Johannes, Bishop of Lyon. Between 1903 and 1910, he consecrated twelve more Gnostic Bishops, including Leon Champrenaud (1870-1925) as Tau Théophane, Bishop of Versailles; René Guenon (1886-1951) as Tau Palingénus, Bishop of Alexandria; and Patrice Genty (1883-1964) as Tau Basilide.

After the death of Fabre des Essarts in 1917, the Patriarchate of the Gnostic Church was assumed by Léon Champrenaud (Tau Théophane). Champrenaud was succeeded by Patrice Genty (Tau Basilide) in 1921, who put l'Église Gnostique de France to rest in 1926 in favour of Jean Bricaud's "Église Gnostique Universelle".

# L'Église Catholique Gnostique



Eugène Vintras

Jean Bricaud, Tau Johannes, had been educated in a Roman Catholic seminary where he had studied for the priesthood; but he renounced his conventional religious pursuits at the age of 16 to pursue mystical occultism. He became involved with the "Eliate Church of Carmel" and the "Work of Mercy" founded in 1839 by Eugène Vintras (1807-1875), and the "Johannite Church of Primitive Christians", founded in 1803 by the Templar revivalist Bernard-Raymond Fabré-Palaprat (1777-1838). He had met Encausse in 1899 and had already joined his Martinist Order.

In 1907, with the encouragement (if not direct pressure) of Encausse, Bricaud broke from Fabre des Essarts to found his own schismatic branch of the Gnostic Church. Fugairon decided to join Bricaud. The primary motive for this schism seems to have been the desire to create a branch of the Gnostic Church whose structure and doctrine would more closely parallel those of the Roman Catholic Church rather than those of the Cathar Church (for instance, it included an Order of Priesthood and baptism with water), and which would be more closely tied to the Martinist Order. Doinel had been a Martinist, Bricaud was a Martinist, but Fabre des Essarts was not. Bricaud, Fugairon and Encausse at first tentatively named their branch of the church "l'Église Catholique Gnostique" (the Gnostic Catholic Church). It was announced as being a fusion of the three existing "gnostic" churches of France: Doinel's Gnostic Church, Vintras's Carmelite Church and Fabré - Palaprat's Johannite Church. In February of 1908, the episcopal synod of the Gnostic Catholic Church met again and elected Bricaud its patriarch as Tau Jean II. After 1907, in order to clearly distinguish the two branches of the Gnostic church, l'Église Gnostique of Fabre des Essarts became generally known as "l'Église Gnostique de France".

## The 1908 Paris Conference

On 24th June 1908, Encausse organized an "International Masonic and Spiritualist Conference" in Paris, at which he received, for no money, a patent from Theodor Reuss (Merlin Peregrinus, 1855-1923), head of O.T.O., to establish a "Supreme Grand Council General of the Unified Rites of Antient and Primitive Masonry for the Grand Orient of France



and its Dependencies at Paris". In the same year, the name of l'Église Catholique Gnostique was changed to "l'Église Gnostique Universelle" ("the Universal Gnostic Church").

About four years later, two important documents were published: the *Manifesto of the M.:M.:M.:* (The M.:M.:M.: was the British Section of O.T.O.), which included the "Gnostic Catholic Church" in the list of organizations whose "wisdom and knowledge" are concentrated in O.T.O.; and the "Jubilee Edition" of *The Oriflamme*, the official organ of the Reuss O.T.O., which announced that *l'Initiation*, Encausse's journal, was the "Official Organ of the Memphis and Mizraim Rites and the O.T.O. in France", with Encausse listed as the publisher.

The precise details of the transactions of the 1908 Paris conference are unknown, but based on the course of subsequent events, the logical conclusion is that Encausse and Reuss engaged in a fraternal exchange of authority: Reuss receiving episcopal and primatial authority in l'Église Catholique Gnostique and Encausse receiving authority in the Rites of Memphis and Mizraim. For his German branch of the Church, Reuss translated "l'Église Catholique Gnostique" into German as "Die Gnostische Katholische Kirche" (G.K.K.); while Encausse, Fugairon and Bricaud changed the name of their French branch of the Church to "l'Église Gnostique Universelle" (E.G.U.), with Bricaud as patriarch. As with all of his other organizational acquisitions, Reuss included the G.K.K. under the umbrella of O.T.O. For their part, Bricaud, Fugairon and Encausse declared the E.G.U. to be the official church of Martinism in 1911.

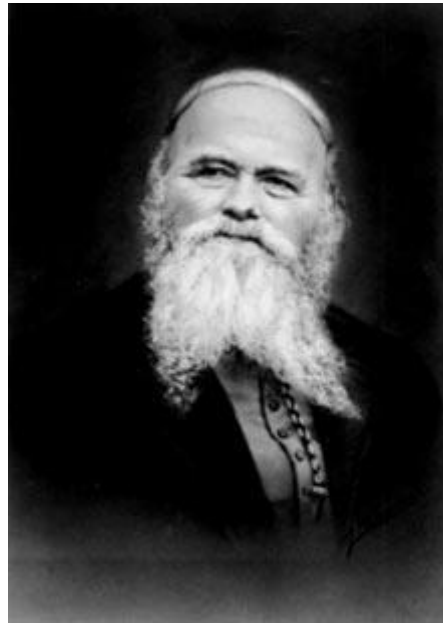
## The E.G.U. and the Antioch Succession



Louis-Marie-François Giraud

After assuming the Patriarchate of the Universal Gnostic Church, Bricaud became friendly with Bishop Louis-Marie-François Giraud (Mgr. François, d. 1951), an ex-Trappist Monk who traced his episcopal succession to Joseph René Vilatte (Mar Timotheos, 1854-1929). Vilatte was a Parisian who had emigrated to America early in life. He was a lifelong religious enthusiast, but he was unable to find fulfillment within the strictures of the Roman Catholic Church; so, in America, he began a quest for a religious environment more congenial to his personality and ambitions. He wandered from sect to sect, serving for a time as a Congregationalist minister, later being ordained to the priesthood within the schismatic "Old Catholic" sect. He ultimately obtained episcopal consecration in 1892 at the hands of Bishop Antonio Francisco - Xavier Alvarez (Mar Julius I), Bishop of the Syrian Jacobite Orthodox Church and Metropolitan of the Independent Catholic Church of Ceylon,

Goa and India, who had in turn received consecration from Ignatius Peter III, "Peter the Humble", Jacobite Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch. Vilatte consecrated Paolo Miraglia-Gulotti in 1900; Gulotti consecrated Jules Houssaye (or Hussay, 1844-1912) in 1904; Houssaye consecrated Louis-Marie-François Giraud in 1911, and Giraud consecrated Jean Bricaud on 21st July 1913.



Jules Houssaye

This consecration was important for Bricaud's church because it provided a valid and documented apostolic episcopal succession, which was recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as valid but "illicit" (i.e., spiritually efficacious, but unsanctioned and contrary to Church policy). The apostolic succession was also widely perceived as reflecting a transmission of true spiritual authority in the Christian current extending as far back as Saint Peter; and even further to Melchizedek, the semi-mythical priest-king of Salem who served as priest to the Hebrew patriarch Abraham. It provided Bricaud and his successors with the apostolic authority to administer the Christian sacraments; which was important because many of the members of the Martinist Order were of the Catholic faith, but as members of a secret society were subject to excommunication if their Martinist affiliation became known. The E.G.U. thus offered continued assurance of salvation to Catholic Christians who were Martinists or who wished to become Martinists.

After Encausse's death in 1916, the Martinist Order and the French sections of the Rites of Memphis and Mizraim and the O.T.O. were briefly headed by Charles Henri Détré (Teder). Détré died in 1918 and was succeeded by Bricaud.

On 15th May 1918, Bricaud consecrated Victor Blanchard (Tau Targelius), who had been secretary to Encausse and Détré. On 18th September 1919, Bricaud reconsecrated Theodor Reuss *sub conditione* (this term refers to a consecration which is intended to remedy some "defect" of a previous consecration), thereby endowing him with the Antioch succession, and appointed him "Gnostic Legate" of the E.G.U. to Switzerland.

Disagreements soon erupted between Bricaud and Blanchard over leadership of the Martinist Order, which developed into a violent mutual hostility. Blanchard eventually broke with Bricaud to form his own schismatic Martinist Order, which was to be known as the "Martinist and Synarchic Order". Blanchard's branch later participated in the formation of an "ecumenical council" of occult rites known by the initials F.U.D.O.S.I., from which H. Spencer Lewis's A.M.O.R.C. drew much of its authority. In turn, Bricaud's branch, under his successor Constant Chevillon, joined with R. Swinburne Clymer, Lewis's Rosicrucian adversary, to form a rival council called F.U.D.O.S.I.

Blanchard went on to consecrate at least five other Gnostic Bishops under his own authority, including Charles Arthur Horwath, who later reconsecrated, *sub conditione*, Patrice Genty (Tau Basilide), the last patriarch of *l'Église Gnostique de France*, who had previously been consecrated in Doinel's spiritual succession by Fabre des Essarts; and Roger Ménard (Tau Eon II), who then consecrated Robert Ambelain (Tau Robert) in 1946. Ambelain proceeded to found his own Gnostic Church, *l'Église Gnostique Apostolique*, in 1953, the year of Blanchard's death. Ambelain consecrated at least 10 Gnostic Bishops within *l'Église Gnostique Apostolique*, including Pedro Freire (Tau Pierre), Primate of Brazil; Andre Mauer (Tau Andreas), Primate of Franche-Comte; and Roger Pommery (Tau Jean), Titular Bishop of Macheronte.



Constant Chevillon

Bricaud died on 21st February 1934, and was succeeded as Patriarch of the E.G.U. and as Grand Master of the Martinist Order by Constant Chevillon (Tau Harmonius). Chevillon was consecrated by Giraud in 1936, and he subsequently consecrated a number of bishops himself, including R. Swinburne Clymer in 1938, and Arnoldo Krumm-Heller (founder of the *Fraternitas Rosicruciana Antiqua* and Reuss' O.T.O. representative for South America) in 1939. During World War II, the Vichy puppet government of occupied France banned all secret societies, and on 15th April 1942 the E.G.U. was officially dissolved by the government. On 22nd March 1944, Chevillon was brutally assassinated by soldiers of Klaus Barbie's occupation forces.

The E.G.U. was revived after the war, and in 1945 Tau Renatus was elected as the successor to the martyred Chevillon. Renatus was succeeded in 1948 by Charles-Henry Dupont (Tau Charles-Henry), who stepped down in 1960 in favour of Robert Ambelain (Tau Jean III), who had achieved considerable prominence through his writings. Ambelain finally put l'Église Gnostique Universelle to rest in favour of his own "Église Gnostique Apostolique".

Tau Jean III was succeeded as patriarch of l'Église Gnostique Apostolique by André Mauer (Tau Andreas) in 1969, who was succeeded by Pedro Freire (Tau Pierre), primate of South America, in 1970. The same year, Freire had been reconsecrated as Mar Petrus-Johannes XIII, patriarch of l'Église Gnostique Catholique Apostolique, by Dom Antidio Vargas of the Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church (1). On his death in 1978, Freire was succeeded by Edmond Fieschi (Tau Sialul I), who abdicated as patriarch in favour of his coadjutor Fermin Vale-Amesti (Tau Valentinus III), who declined to accept the office: effectively putting l'Église Gnostique Apostolique as well as l'Église Gnostique Catholique Apostolique to rest as international organizations. A North American autocephalous branch of l'Église Gnostique Catholique Apostolique survived under the leadership of Primate Roger Saint-Victor Hérard (Tau Charles), who consecrated a number of bishops but died in 1989 without appointing a successor. Several of Hérard's bishops are still active in the U.S.

## **The G.K.K. and the E.G.C.**

Aleister Crowley (1875-1947) joined Reuss' O.T.O. as a VII° in 1910 (at the time, any 33° Scottish Rite Mason could join O.T.O. at the VII° level). On 1st June 1912, Crowley received from Reuss the IX° and his appointment as National Grand Master X° for Ireland, Iona, and all Britain (the British Section of O.T.O. was called "Mysteria Mystica Maxima", or M°.M°.M°.), taking the name "Baphomet" as his magical title. The next year, he published the *Manifesto of the M°.M°.M°.*, which includes the Gnostic Catholic Church in the list of organizations whose "wisdom and knowledge" are concentrated in O.T.O.

Crowley also wrote *Liber XV: The Gnostic Mass* in 1913. *Liber XV* was first published in 1918 in *The International*, then again in 1919 in *The Equinox*, Vol. III, No. 1 (the "Blue Equinox"), and finally in 1929/30 in Appendix VI of *Magick in Theory and Practice*. The Latin name *Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica* (E.G.C.) was coined by Crowley in 1913 when he wrote *Liber XV*.

In Chapter 73 of Crowley's *Confessions*, he states that he wrote the *Gnostic Mass* as the "Ritual of the Gnostic Catholic Church", which he prepared "for the use of the O.T.O., the central ceremony of its public and private celebration, corresponding to the Mass of the Roman Catholic Church". It is evident that Crowley viewed the Gnostic Catholic Church and the O.T.O. as inseparable, particularly with respect to the IX° of O.T.O., into which Crowley had been initiated the year before he wrote the *Gnostic Mass*, and which is termed the "Sovereign Sanctuary of the Gnosis".

In 1918, Reuss translated Crowley's *Gnostic Mass* into German, making a number of editorial modifications, and published it under the auspices of O.T.O. In his publication of the *Gnostic Mass*, Reuss listed Bricaud as the Sovereign Patriarch of l'Église Gnostique Universelle, and himself as both the Gnostic Legate to Switzerland for l'Église Gnostique

Universelle and as the Sovereign Patriarch and Primate of Die Gnostische Katholische Kirche, a title which he may have received at the 1908 Paris conference.

Crowley's *Gnostic Mass*, despite its many structural similarities to the Mass of the Roman Catholic Church, is expressly a Thelemic ritual rather than a Christian one. Reuss' translation preserved the essentially Thelemic/Gnostic character of the ritual, although it indicates that Reuss' understanding of Thelema diverged somewhat from Crowley's. Reuss' publication of the *Gnostic Mass* was a significant event for two reasons: it represented the declaration of independence of Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica from Église Gnostique Universelle, and it represented the church's formal acceptance of the Law of Thelema at the highest level.

## The Modern E.G.C.



Charles Stansfeld Jones

After Reuss, the succession to leadership of the Thelemic Gnostic Catholic Church within O.T.O. passed to his successor as Outer Head of the Order (O.H.O.), Aleister Crowley; whose accession in 1922 restored the original version of the *Gnostic Mass*. Crowley appears to have celebrated the Gnostic Mass a number of times at his Abbey of Thelema in Cefalù, Sicily. He also made an audio recording of the Gnostic Mass some time during the 1930s, with a singer named Dolores Sillarno singing the lines of the priestess; but only portions of this recording seem to have survived.

It is unclear whether Charles Stansfeld Jones (1886-1950), who served as Grand Master X° for North America under both Reuss and Crowley, ever celebrated the Gnostic Mass as part of his O.T.O. activities. However, one of the members of his Agapé Lodge in Vancouver, British Columbia, was a man named Wilfred T. Smith (1887-1957). Smith moved to Southern California in the 1920s, and in 1930 began to assemble an O.T.O. working group in Hollywood. This group began to celebrate the Gnostic Mass on a weekly basis in 1933, and in 1935 the group was chartered as Agapé Lodge (the second O.T.O. Lodge of that name). The next year, Crowley appointed Smith as National Grand Master General X° for the United States. The Gnostic Mass was celebrated every Sunday evening at Agapé Lodge by Smith and priestess Regina Kahl (1891-1945) from 1933 until 1942, when the Lodge moved to a new facility in Pasadena, California (2). Jane Wolfe (1875-1958), who had studied with Crowley personally during the 1920s in Cefalù, assisted Smith and Kahl in

developing a standard of performance for the Gnostic Mass, and frequently served as deacon in the ceremony.



Wilfred T. Smith



Regina Kahl

Crowley died in 1947, and was succeeded as O.H.O. by Karl Germer (Saturnus, 1885-1962). During Germer's tenure as O.H.O., the only group regularly celebrating the Gnostic Mass was the Swiss O.T.O. under Hermann Metzger (1919-1990), which began celebrating the Gnostic Mass in the 1950s at its temple in Stein. Germer died in 1962 without naming a successor. The O.T.O. was dormant in the U.S. from 1962 until 1969 when Grady McMurtry (Hymenaeus Alpha, 1918-1985), the last ranking officer of O.T.O. International Headquarters remaining active, exercised emergency powers granted to him in the 1940s by Crowley and acceded to the office of Caliph and O.H.O. of O.T.O. In July of 1977, Hymenaeus Alpha and the members of the newly-revived O.T.O. formally celebrated the Gnostic Mass - the first time in the U.S. since the days of Agapé Lodge.

Unlike the other organizations encompassed by O.T.O., E.G.C. has its own published ritual which could be practiced outside the context of the O.T.O. initiation structure. The Gnostic Mass has its own officers. Although the ritual calls for them to make use of the signs of various O.T.O. degrees, the officers do not have an immediately obvious correlation with O.T.O. degrees. *Liber XV* also refers to the administration of other sacramental rites such as baptisms, confirmations, marriages and the ordination of clergy. The E.G.C. could,

theoretically, operate independently of O.T.O. In 1979, under Hymenaeus Alpha, a non-profit religious corporation independent of O.T.O. was established under the name "Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica". This was a well-intentioned but short-lived attempt to spread Thelema to a broader audience than it was believed O.T.O. was able to do. The E.G.C. developed its own policies and procedures for baptisms, confirmations and ordinations (which are alluded to in *Liber XV*), and its own hierarchy of bishops, priests, priestesses, exorcists, novices and deacons, largely based on the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. Between autumn 1984 and autumn 1985, the independent E.G.C. produced four numbers of a publication called *Ecclesia Gnostica*.



Karl Germer

Grady McMurtry died in 1985, and, in accordance with his wishes, his successor was elected by vote of the Sovereign Sanctuary of the Gnosis, the IX° membership of the O.T.O. His successor took the magical title "Hymenaeus Beta". When Hymenaeus Beta took office, he perceived that the divergence of the paths of E.G.C. and O.T.O. would ultimately be unhealthy for the development of Thelema. The O.T.O. required the focus and open social structure provided by the regular celebration of the Gnostic Mass, and the E.G.C. required the perspective and esoteric teachings of the O.T.O. initiatory system. Hymenaeus Beta dissolved the E.G.C. corporation in 1985, and in 1987 reintegrated the E.G.C. into the O.T.O. by incorporating provisions in the O.T.O. Bylaws specifying that there was to be a class of O.T.O. membership called "Ecclesiastical Membership", which would consist of the bishops of the E.G.C. Since it was believed at the time that cells of the Gnostic Catholic Church existed outside O.T.O., provisions were included in the Bylaws which permitted the bishops of such branches to affiliate with O.T.O. as Ecclesiastical Members upon mutual recognition (3).





Grady McMurtry

The Ecclesiastical Members were allowed to exercise their "traditional" episcopal powers with little interference. The new E.G.C., consisting of the Ecclesiastical Membership of O.T.O., published four numbers of a newsletter called *Gnostic Gnews* between December 1988 and September 1989.

When the E.G.C. converted from Christianity to Thelema, it ceased to be an institution dedicated to the administration of Christian sacraments. Therefore, a valid Christian apostolic succession was no longer of critical relevance. The traditional apostolic succession may be of some interest and value within the Thelemic E.G.C. as an aspect of the traditions inherited from the pre-Thelemic French Gnostic Church, and as a form of symbolic successorship to the great Christian, Hebraic and Pagan religious systems of the past; however, for a church which purports to represent the Thelemic religion, an "apostolic" or sacerdotal succession from the Prophet of Thelema is far more relevant, in a purely spiritual and theological sense, than a succession from the apostles of the "Pale Galilean".

Nevertheless, it was commonly held within the E.G.C. under Hymenaeus Alpha, and for a time under Hymenaeus Beta as well, that a valid traditional apostolic succession would increase the prestige of the E.G.C. and help it to achieve recognition from the civil authorities. Attempts were made to demonstrate that Crowley himself possessed a valid Christian apostolic succession in the Vilatte line through Theodor Reuss (he almost certainly did not), and further attempts were made to strengthen the traditional apostolic succession within E.G.C. by bringing in additional lines of succession from outside sources. Some O.T.O. members were recognized as E.G.C. bishops after receiving consecration from bishops outside the E.G.C., and certain bishops of other branches of the Gnostic Church were recognized as Ecclesiastical Members of O.T.O. A number of articles on the various putative lines of traditional apostolic succession within E.G.C. were published in the *Gnostic Gnews*.



Unfortunately, the emphasis on the apostolic succession and the semi-autonomy of the bishops resulted in an erosion of central control. It came to be widely believed that the traditional apostolic succession, which could be passed from one individual to another by the simple laying on of hands, was sufficient to become an E.G.C. bishop. The practical function of the bishops as church administrators and overseers of the rites was becoming overshadowed by the mystique of the apostolic succession, and a number of unqualified individuals were consecrated as "bishops" without the requisite notification or preparation. Then, synchronistically, outside criticism began to raise serious doubts about the technical validity of the traditional apostolic succession current in the E.G.C. Also, with Ecclesiastical Membership limited to bishops, the role of the priests, priestesses and deacons as visible representatives of the E.G.C. was undervalued. A number of priests and priestesses were ordained without so much as having ever attended a Gnostic Mass. The church had reached a crisis of identity, and a fundamental reassessment of its structure, its relationship with O.T.O., the roles of its officers, and the relevance of the traditional apostolic succession and other such residual, pre-Thelemic, institutions was in order.

In the Fall of 1990, Hymenaeus Beta suspended the consecration of bishops within E.G.C. until policies could be developed which would establish formal qualifications for Ecclesiastical Membership. This was accomplished in the Fall of 1991 by the adoption of a policy which expanded the definition of Ecclesiastical Membership to include priests, priestesses and deacons, and which required ordained officers of E.G.C. to be initiated members of specified rank within O.T.O. before they would be formally recognized as such by O.T.O. Deacons were required to be at least 1° members of O.T.O. and thus full members of the Order; priests and priestesses were required to be initiates of the degree of K.E.W. (which falls between IV° and V°), the first degree in the O.T.O. series to which admission is by invitation only; and bishops were required to be of at least the VII°, which gives them the power to initiate to the K.E.W. degree and thus to ordain priests and priestesses.

In 1993, an outline of a Thelemic baptism ritual written by Aleister Crowley was discovered, and has been incorporated into the E.G.C. system. In March 1996, Frater Sabazius X° was created Primate of E.G.C. in the U.S.A.; and this expansion and progress has continued up to the present day, with Tau Sanguinus being created Primate of E.G.C. in Great Britain and Northern Ireland in May 2005, and Frater Shiva X° being appointed Primate of E.G.C. in Australia in April 2006.

As the liturgical and ministerial wing of Ordo Templi Orientis, the Gnostic Catholic Church continues to develop and evolve with the growth of its membership, the creative input of its officers and the progressive manifestation of the Thelemic-Gnostic egregore. The process has not been without its difficulties, but, to paraphrase *Liber Librae*, in trials and troubles is Strength, and by their means is a pathway opened unto the Light.

## Notes

1. The Brazilian Catholic Apostolic Church was founded in 1945 by Mgr. Carlos Duarte Costa, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Botacatu, who was excommunicated by the Holy See for having criticized Pope Pius XII for blessing Nazi and Fascist troops in St. Peter's Square in 1943.

2. A rumour was once circulated to the effect that the Gnostic Mass as celebrated at Agapé Lodge included explicit sexual conduct. According to surviving members of Agapé Lodge, the rumour was entirely spurious. The text of *Liber XV* was followed closely, and the priestess always appeared fully clothed.

3. The term was later corrected to "Gnostic Church". The Gnostic Catholic Church officially ceased to exist outside O.T.O. in 1908, when the name of Église Catholique Gnostique was changed to "Église Gnostique Universelle". This clause is now used only for the establishment of amicable relations rather than for conferral of actual episcopal authority in E.G.C.

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- Reuss' translation of the Gnostic Mass was published in 1918 rather than 1920; and

- the document published about four years after the 1908 Paris Conference was "The Manifesto of the M.'.M.'.M.'.M.'" rather than "The Manifesto of the O.T.O."

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