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Freemasonry and the Catholic Enlightenment in Eighteenth-Century France

Kenneth Loisel

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Two years before the outbreak of the Great War, conservative journalist Arthur Meyer looked back at the recent history of France during the Belle Époque, and he did so with bitter disappointment. While those on the left had celebrated the triumph of republicanism since the middle of the 1880s, monarchists like Meyer lamented that Roman Catholicism had receded from public life during this same period. Most troubling for Meyer was the removal of the Church from public education through the 1881–82 education legislation pushed forward by Jules Ferry. For Meyer, Ferry was nothing more than the plaything of a much wider plot to rid France of its traditional values: “To attack Catholics, to dechristianize France, Jules Ferry naturally had to rely on three forces . . . Jews [from which the converted Meyer had originated], freethinkers and above all the Freemasons.”¹

Meyer’s views about Freemasonry as the staunch enemy of Catholicism and champion of secularism was the culmination of more than a century of an anti-masonic propaganda campaign orchestrated by both laity and clergy who first pointed a damning figure at the fraternity for the toppling of monarchy in the 1790s.² Over the course of the nineteenth century, as seen in the encyclicals of Leo XIII (*Humanum genus* in 1884 and *Inimica vis* in 1892), the Catholic version of the Revolution crystallized around the key idea that Freemasonry was a “satanic” sect whose primary objective was the promotion of radical politics on

* I am grateful to the participants of the Eighteenth-Century Interdisciplinary Salon at Washington University in St. Louis and the Consortium on the Revolutionary Era for having provided helpful feedback on earlier versions of this research, and I warmly acknowledge the generous and incisive commentary of the *Journal*’s outside reviewers.

¹ Arthur Meyer, *Ce que mes yeux ont vu* (Paris, 1912), 128–29.

² The opening salvo was Abbé Jacques-François Lefranc’s *Le voile levé pour les curieux, ou le secret de la révolution de France révélé à l’aide de la franc-maçonnerie* (Paris, 1791). On anti-Masonry during the Revolution: Jacques Lemaire, *Les origines françaises de l’antimaçonisme (1744–1797)* (Brussels, 1985), 81–97. The association of Freemasonry with radical politics during the revolutionary era was not a uniquely French phenomenon. The antimasonic writings of former German Masons, Ludwig Adolf Christian von Grolman and J. A. Starck, have received treatment in Klaus Epstein, *The Genesis of German Conservatism* (Princeton, NJ, 1966), chap. 10.

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the left and the evacuation of religion from the public realm.³ But clerical hostility to Freemasonry was not solely a by-product of the revolutionary tumult; indeed, it could be found during the fraternity's earliest years in the reign of Louis XV. In 1738, a little more than a decade after Jacobite exiles founded the first masonic lodges in Paris, Clement XII issued a papal bull condemning the fraternity for its secretive and interconfessional nature, threatened Catholic Masons with excommunication, and urged bishops to act swiftly.⁴ French prelates in Marseille (1742), Orléans (1744), Limoges (1748), Poitiers (1753), and Quimper (1776) subsequently warned men to stay away from lodges because of the heterodox nature of masonic religious orientation; Bishop de Saint-Luc of Quimper went so far as to claim that Freemasonry inexorably led to "deism and libertinage."⁵

Aware of these attacks, Old Regime brethren went to great lengths to make clear to outsiders that they embraced Christianity as their guiding ethical pillar. One of the earliest apologies to confront this issue directly was the *Apologie pour l'ordre des Francs-Maçons* (1742), which found it necessary to "respond very seriously to the suspicions of atheism, of deism, of indifference in religious matters. . . . [These] subjects by their very atrocity refute themselves, but it nevertheless seemed necessary that the core of our order offer some explanation to the public." The author went on to stress that belief in the soteriological function of Jesus—whose actions the author described as "the eternal sacrifice of a God who really wanted to die for them"—was absolutely central to Freemasonry.⁶ This message that only devout Christians were to be admitted and that anticlerical and heterodox thought had no place in lodges was further bolstered in numerous apologies intended for both a masonic and a general readership from 1740s down to the Revolution.⁷ Writing to a potential recruit in 1782, Lyonnais lodge master Jean-Baptiste Willermoz described the fraternity as an apprenticeship in creating a "moral man who is useful everywhere divine providence has

³ Pierre Chevallier, *Histoire de la Franc-maçonnerie française. La Maçonnerie: Missionnaire du libéralisme, 1800–1877* (Paris, 1974), 152–60.

⁴ Clement's *In eminenti apostolatus* was reaffirmed in 1751 with Benedict XIV's *Providas Romanorum*. Pierre Chevallier, *La première profanation du temple maçonnique ou Louis XV et la fraternité 1737–1755* (Paris, 1968), 143–45.

⁵ Monseigneur de Saint-Luc's condemnation can be found in Joseph-Marie Téphany, *Histoire de la persécution religieuse dans les diocèses de Quimper et de Léon de 1790 à 1801* (Quimper, 1879), 115–20.

⁶ *Apologie pour l'ordre des Francs-Maçons par Mr. N***, membre de l'ordre* (The Hague, 1742), "Avertissement" (unpaginated), 111.

⁷ See, for example, *Défense apologétique des francs-maçons* (Frankfurt, 1747), 26–27; Théodore-Henri de Tschoudy, *Étrenne au pape, ou les francs-maçons vangés* (The Hague, 1752), 55; Frère Jarrhetti, *L'Orateur franc-maçon* (Berlin, 1766), 69–82; Jean-Pierre-Louis Beyerlé, *Essai sur la franc-maçonnerie* (Latomopolis [Paris or Nancy], 1784), 1:116.

placed him. . . . Through the medium of diverse symbols, emblems, and allegories . . . we nurture in men the love of a constant practice of religious, moral, and social duties so that they acquire the custom of that amiable and tender virtue . . . which is founded on the unbreakable foundations of the Christian religion.”⁸

Taking Willermoz’s description as a starting point, this article traces the interaction between Christianity and French Freemasonry, chiefly from the 1770s to the Reign of Terror. The central thrust of this study is that the fraternity represented an institutional manifestation in France of what scholars have called the “Catholic Enlightenment.” This term first emerged in German Catholic historiography over a century ago and has since migrated into mainstream scholarship thanks to the work of Bernard Plongeron and the more recent contributions from Jeffrey Burson and Ulrich Lehner.⁹ Although French Catholic Enlightenment authors’ views varied considerably according to decade and theological trends, they all expressed to different degrees the following four core tenets. First, writers such as Abbé Houteville (*La religion chrétienne prouvée par les faits*, 1722) and abbé Pluche (*Spectacle de la nature*, 1732–50) argued for the existence of a providential divinity and the veracity of scripture based on proof with either rational or empirical grounds.¹⁰ Second, lay and clerical writers emphasized the practicality of both the institution and the credo of Roman Catholicism as instruments for individual moral improvement, public welfare, and social cohesion. To a certain extent, the utility of the faith had been stressed since Trent, as seen in the Counter-Reformation religious orders in France devoted to poor relief and education such as the Vincentians, the Religious Hospitallers of Saint Joseph, and the French Oratory.¹¹ By the 1760s, however, a sense of urgency gripped the faithful in light of the anticlerical Enlightenment’s utilitarian critique of the Church, personified most clearly by d’Holbach and Voltaire. Clerical apologists such as Gabriel Gauchat, François de Gourcy, and Jean-Baptiste Rose consequently rose to the occasion and presented Christianity as the key to political stability, moral

⁸ Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon (hereafter BML) MS 5918bis.

⁹ Jeffrey Burson, *The Culture of Enlightening: Abbé Claude Yvon and the Entangled Emergence of the Enlightenment* (Notre Dame, IN, 2019); Jeffrey Burson and Ulrich Lehner, eds., *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe: A Transnational History* (Notre Dame, IN, 2014); Ulrich Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment: The Forgotten History of a Global Movement* (Oxford, 2016); Bernard Plongeron, “‘Recherches sur l’*’Aufklärung’ catholique en Europe occidentale, 1770–1830,”* *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 16 (1969): 555–605. There was nothing exclusively French or Catholic about these developments, as scholars have observed similar trends elsewhere and among different faith traditions. See Harm Klueting, ed., *Katholische Aufklärung—Aufklärung im katholischen Deutschland* (Hamburg, 1993), and David Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment: Protestants, Jews, and Catholics from London to Vienna* (Princeton, NJ, 2008).

¹⁰ J. B. Shank, *The Newton Wars and the Beginning of the French Enlightenment* (Chicago, 2008), 225.

¹¹ Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment*, 4–11.

perfectibility, and temporal happiness. In his multivolume *Accord du christianisme et de la raison* (1768), for example, Gauchat explained to his reader that since the Gospels taught submission and humility, “the Christian is thereby the perfect citizen.”¹² A third pillar of the French Catholic Enlightenment was the idea that interconfessional dialogue with Protestants was ultimately more productive than conflict in a century of growing heterodoxy that threatened Christianity itself. In 1713, the Jesuit Gabriel Daniel’s reinterpretation of the infamous Saint Bartholomew’s Day massacre as a bloody and unjustifiable persecution inaugurated the eighteenth century’s revision of this event as the slaughter of innocents.¹³ Benedictine Augustin Calmet, whose biblical exegesis and ecclesiastical history were widely respected by both *philosophes* and the faithful, further suggested that the theological disagreements between Catholics and Protestants were rather minor, since he contended that they originated primarily from a handful of passages in the New Testament that Martin Luther had regrettably misunderstood.¹⁴ Fourth and finally, Catholic Enlighteners understood that the combat against incredulity required that the message of Christ in the Gospels be conveyed in the most accessible manner possible. Although Christocentrism can be traced back at least to the late medieval *Devotio moderna* movement, Enlightenment preachers modified this tradition to redefine Jesus not only as the savior of humanity but most importantly as a teacher of ethics and model of selfless Christian service to others. This humanized image of Christ was promoted widely in printed apologies, as well as in the sermons delivered up and down the countryside during the many rural missions various religious orders undertook throughout the century.¹⁵

Because most scholarship on the Catholic Enlightenment in France has focused on the lay and clerical elite who wrote or reviewed the century’s body of apologetic work, a lot more remains to be learned about how ordinary Catholics put into practice a form of worship that purported to be irenic, practical, simplified, and Christocentric. Such an inquiry will allow us to undertake a more sociologically informed study of the Catholic Enlightenment whose chief aim is to assess how these ideas circulated within specific historical settings. Freemasonry stands out as a helpful case study to understand the contextual resonance of the Catholic Enlightenment because it was one of the most widespread and diverse

¹² Gabriel Gauchat, *Accord du christianisme et de la raison* (Paris, 1768), 3:180.

¹³ David Garrioch, *The Huguenots of Paris and the Coming of Religious Freedom, 1685–1789* (Cambridge, 2014), 204.

¹⁴ Bertram Eugene Schwarzbach, “Dom Augustin Calmet: Homme des Lumières malgré lui?,” *Dix-huitième siècle* 34 (2002): 451–63.

¹⁵ Louis Châtellier, “La mission du XVIIIe siècle, aux frontières de l’esprit tridentin et de l’idéal des Lumières,” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée* 109 (1997): 757–66.

voluntary organizations in the Old Regime. On the eve of the Revolution, Freemasonry boasted at least 50,000 men in France and 600 functioning lodges whose overwhelmingly Catholic membership ranged from skilled artisans to the highest echelons of the nobility.¹⁶ An investigation into the connections between Freemasonry and the Catholic Enlightenment makes sense for two reasons. First, regular and secular clergy were not always ambivalent about Freemasonry; many enthusiastically joined lodges from the fraternity's earliest years. In a 1741 letter to a correspondent in Aix, a professor writing from the Académie de Lausanne acknowledged that he was a Freemason and said that he was honored to count many Catholic clergy among his fellow brethren. He explained that a "great number of priests, whether they be secular or regular clergy, have been initiated," and that it was fortunate that these men have "put reasonable limits on the obedience they owe to their superiors."¹⁷ In towns like Soissons, Valence, and Villefranche, clergy made up nearly 20 percent of Masons, while in Angers the figure was nearly 30 percent. Understandably, dioceses whose bishops were vehemently opposed to the order tended to have lower rates of clerical affiliation; in Marseille, for example, only 0.4 percent of Masons were members of the First Estate.¹⁸ Exploring the points of contact between Freemasonry and the Catholic Enlightenment is also warranted in light of the recent work of Carolina Armenteros, Jeffrey Burson, Gabriel Glickman, and Ulrich Lehner, who have all found Catholic Enlightenment themes such as tolerance and the social utilitarianism of the faith in the writings of well-known French Freemasons such as Joseph de Maistre, Charles Radcliffe, Andrew Ramsay, and Claude Yvon.¹⁹ The time is therefore ripe to penetrate further into the inner workings of lodges in order to explore at the most granular level possible the degree to which Old Regime Freemasonry was imbued with Catholic Enlightenment beliefs.

Up until quite recently, seeing eighteenth-century French Freemasonry as an organization that had anything in common with the Catholic Church would have indeed raised eyebrows, since the highly visible conflicts between brethren and Catholicism in modern France had led past generations of historians to describe

¹⁶ Gérard Gayot, *La franc-maçonnerie française: Textes et pratiques, XVIIIe–XIXe siècles* (Paris, 1980), 32.

¹⁷ Bibliothèque municipale d'Aix MS 1281 (1163), fol. 134v (October 25, 1741, letter).

¹⁸ Daniel Roche, *Le siècle des Lumières en province: Académies et académiciens provinciaux, 1680–1789* (Paris, 1978), 2:419.

¹⁹ Carolina Armenteros, "Joseph de Maistre (1753–1821): Heir of the Enlightenment, Enemy of Revolutions, and Spiritual Progressivist," and Gabriel Glickman, "Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686–1743): Catholic Freethinking and Enlightened Mysticism," in Burson and Lehner, *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe*, 125–43, 391–410; Burson, *Culture of Enlightening*; Ulrich Lehner, "Introduction: The Many Faces of the Catholic Enlightenment," in *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment in Europe*, ed. Ulrich Lehner and Michael Printy (Leiden, 2010), 41n182.

Masonry in the Old Regime as “free of all religious character” and “unrelentingly secular.”²⁰ This view is no longer tenable, however, because of the more nuanced understanding we now have of masonic sociability, due in no small part to the microhistorical research of Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire on lodges in Lyon and Strasbourg where he has uncovered a conciliatory ecumenism within Freemasonry that sought to bridge the doctrinal gap between Catholics and Protestants.²¹ Beaurepaire’s work is part of a more general recognition among historians that Catholicism and the Enlightenment—even in France where anticlericalism was quite vocal—were not inherently oppositional. Recent studies by Jeffrey Burson and others have significantly narrowed the gap between secular writers and their clerical counterparts in France by showing the similar ways in which they talked about the self, used historical evidence to ground philosophical arguments, mobilized metaphors of light to refer to human progress, and praised a reasonable devotion as the key to human happiness and a well-ordered polity.²² Intellectual historians in recent years have built upon the early work of Carl Becker and his student R. R. Palmer by highlighting the hitherto unknown or muted links between clerics and *philosophes*, reminding us that religious figures like the archbishop Fénelon were widely read and offered secular writers a model of how to critique absolute monarchy, luxury, war, and intolerance.²³ In short, as Charly Coleman has summarized, the French Enlightenment is now understood as “a movement that arose within the world of ‘religion’ rather than as a definitive departure from it.”²⁴

In his recent comparative history of the international suppression of the Jesuits, Dale Van Kley has moved away from the notion of a Catholic Enlightenment and has instead used the term “Reform Catholicism” to describe the intellectual

²⁰ Maurice Agulhon, *Pénitents et francs-maçons dans l’ancienne Provence: Essai sur la sociabilité méridionale*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1984), 19; Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Oxford, 1991), 9.

²¹ Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, “Lumières maçonniques et christianisme,” *Dix-huitième siècle* 34 (2002): 27–40.

²² Jeffrey Burson, *The Rise and Fall of Theological Enlightenment: Jean-Martin de Prades and Ideological Polarization in Eighteenth-Century France* (Notre Dame, IN, 2010); Charly Coleman, *The Virtues of Abandon: An Anti-Individualist History of the French Enlightenment* (Stanford, CA, 2014); Tili Boon Cuillé, *Divining Nature: Aesthetics of Enchantment in Enlightenment France* (Stanford, CA, 2020); Alan Kors, *Atheism in France, 1650–1729*, vol. 1, *The Orthodox Sources of Disbelief* (Princeton, NJ, 1990).

²³ Christoph Schmitt-Maaß, Stefanie Stockhorst, and Doohwan Ahn, eds., *Fénelon in the Enlightenment: Traditions, Adaptations, and Variations* (Amsterdam, 2014). On Becker and Palmer, see Anton Matytsin and Dan Edelstein, “Introduction,” in *Let There Be Enlightenment: The Religious and Mystical Sources of Rationality*, ed. Anton Matytsin and Dan Edelstein (Baltimore, MD, 2018), 1–3.

²⁴ Charly Coleman, “Religion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the French Enlightenment*, ed. Daniel Brewer (Cambridge, 2014), 106.

position of anti-Jesuit factions—Jansenist and otherwise—during the second half of the eighteenth century.²⁵ Reform Catholicism and the Catholic Enlightenment overlapped in their mutual emphasis on the charitable function of the Church, the importance of instructing the lay faithful in the central tenets of Christianity, and the recognition of the key role of the parish priest in this process. Despite these similarities, I concur with Van Kley that the concept of Reform Catholicism does not work very well for the French case, and I have chosen in this essay to associate Freemasonry with the Catholic Enlightenment for three specific reasons.²⁶ First, as will be explained in more detail later, Freemasonry did not share the same austere Augustinian anthropology that pervaded Reform Catholicism and Jansenist circles, but rather held a more optimistic vision of human nature that was more in line with Jesuit convictions. A second point of difference is that Van Kley's reformist voices generally were highly critical of the regular clergy because of their perceived ultramontanism, whereas Freemasonry readily welcomed canons and monks into its fold; lodges even operated within the sacred walls of monasteries. In 1785, ten Cistercians founded the Vertu (Virtue) lodge within the Clairvaux Abbey, and three years later nearly all members of a Vannist abbey in Lorraine joined the Concorde (Concord) lodge whose meetings were held inside their monastery.²⁷ And, finally, the most important component of Van Kley's Reform Catholicism was its explicit anti-Jesuit discourse, and this is absent from masonic speeches and apologies. In contrast, some observers during the prerevolutionary era drew parallels between masonic ritual and Jesuit hierarchy and actually worried that the Society of Jesus had infiltrated Freemasonry, with the ultimate aim of resuscitating their expelled organization and re-Catholicizing Protestant lands.²⁸

This article draws from meeting registers, account books, correspondence between brethren, and ritual manuals housed either in underexploited provincial archives or the Russian archives of the Grand Orient de France in Paris, which migrated during the postwar period to the Soviet Union via East Germany and

²⁵ Dale Van Kley, *Reform Catholicism and the International Suppression of the Jesuits in Enlightenment Europe* (New Haven, CT, 2018), 46–56.

²⁶ On the limited applicability of the concept of Reform Catholicism in France and elsewhere, see Van Kley, *Reform Catholicism*, 18, and Lehner, "The Many Faces of the Catholic Enlightenment," 4–5.

²⁷ Pierre Chevallier, "La loge de la Vertu à l'orient de l'abbaye de Clairvaux (1785–1789)," *Mémoires de la Société académique du département de l'Aube* 118 (1994): 53–74; Gérard Michaux, "L'abbaye de Saint-Avoid au siècle des Lumières," *Les cahiers lorrains* 3 (1997): 201–2.

²⁸ Although evidence for such accusations has yet to turn up in the archives, outsiders continued to see a Jesuit-masonic link into the revolutionary era: Charles Porset, "Fructu cognoscitur arbor: Jésuites et franc-maçons. Un dossier revisité," in *Esotérisme, gnosés & imaginaire symbolique: Mélanges offerts à Antoine Faivre*, ed. Richard Caron and Antoine Faivre (Leuven, 2001), 459–70.

returned to France only in 2000.²⁹ Although the following pages explore the masonic experience in lodges throughout France, I devote particular attention to two provincial settings during the years preceding and during the French Revolution: the lodges of *Heureuse Rencontre* (Happy Encounter) in Brest and *Amitié* (Friendship) in Bordeaux. These two organizations provide as good a case study as any because their documentation is quite copious for the 1780s and 1790s—*Heureuse Rencontre*’s records alone run for nearly two thousand manuscript pages—and they resembled, albeit imperfectly, many other French lodges in their membership profile, ritual hierarchy, and meeting structure (ritual performances bookended by speeches and general announcements, followed by charitable giving and dining).³⁰ A closer look at the books brethren owned, the rituals they performed, and the partnerships they forged with local priests in poor relief may help reveal how Freemasonry offered eighteenth-century Frenchmen the opportunity to rethink and act out their faith in ways that echoed and amplified core themes found within the writings of the Catholic Enlightenment.

READING THE CATHOLIC ENLIGHTENMENT IN PREREVOLUTIONARY FRANCE: THE CASE OF *HEUREUSE RENCONTRE*

Since its establishment in 1745, the *Heureuse Rencontre* lodge was built around a core nucleus of men from the royal navy. With the administration of Colbert, Brest was identified as a key site of naval operations due to its strategic location at the tip of Brittany, as well as because the deep waters of the Penfeld were able to welcome the navy’s large ships of the line.³¹ Extant registers from 1780 to 1788 reveal that 104 individuals were initiated into the lodge, and the majority (51 percent) came from a wide cross-section of the naval population.³² On the rolls were sword officers (*officiers d’épée*) who actively served on combat ships at sea or remained in ports to maintain vessels, naval surgeons, and administrative personnel who oversaw the vast munitions and provisions warehouses that lined the Penfeld’s banks, as well as young men in officer training (*Gardes de la Marine*). Reflective

²⁹ Charles Porset, “Un nouveau massif de sources: Les archives du KGB,” in *Franc-maçonnerie et histoire: Bilan et perspectives*, ed. Christine Gaudin and Eric Saunier (Rouen, 2003), 37–43.

³⁰ *Heureuse Rencontre*’s meeting minutes are located at Archives départementales du Finistère (hereafter ADF) MS 40 J 1–5, 9–10. *Amitié*’s accounting records can be found at Bibliothèque du Grand Orient de France (hereafter GODF) MS AR 113.2.93.

³¹ Philippe Jarnoux, Yves Le Gallo, and Fañch Roudaut, “Le port et sa ville au XVIII^e siècle,” in *Histoire de Brest*, ed. Marie-Thérèse Cloître (Brest, 2000), 78.

³² Initiation figures are derived from “Registres de délibérations,” ADF MS 40 J 2–5. The lodge’s recruitment profile was similar during the pre-1780 period. See Jean-Yves Guengant, *Brest et la franc-maçonnerie: Les Amis de Sully, des origines à nos jours* (Brest, 2008), 25–29.

of lodges in other bustling port cities like Bordeaux, La Rochelle, Rochefort, and Toulon, Heureuse Rencontre also welcomed ship captains and merchants (respectively 11 and 12 percent of total initiates) as well as a smaller group of municipal personnel (10 percent of all new brethren).³³ A handful of clergy and lawyers, along with brethren admitted for sought-after talents (notably musicians) and caretakers (known as *frères servants* who were usually drawn from brethren's domestic staff), rounded out the membership of the lodge.³⁴ Although Heureuse Rencontre waived or significantly lowered fees for priests and *frères servants*, it charged a significant 200 livres for others to move through the three first degrees of Apprenticeship, Fellowcraft, and Mastership. This sum, which represented the approximate annual salary of a Brestois skilled artisan, meant that Heureuse Rencontre remained essentially closed off to all but the social and economic elite.³⁵ Although one sixteen-year-old was admitted—a clear violation of the Grand Orient's prohibition against allowing anyone younger than twenty-one into a lodge—most entrants were between the ages of twenty-five and thirty-five, with a mean age of 28.5 years. Such an age profile reflected trends found elsewhere in France and in the rest of the Atlantic world, where young men found in Freemasonry a private space of entertainment and a reliable network of solidarity amidst a rapidly developing urban landscape.³⁶

Over eighty years ago, Daniel Mornet tried to understand how the ideas of the Enlightenment led to the French Revolution in his *Les origines intellectuelles de la Révolution française* (1933), and scholars have ever since pursued multiple archival points of entry to try to figure out what the French were reading in the decades leading up to 1789. Although Freemasonry was one of the largest modes of sociability in eighteenth-century France, we still know very little about which books were present inside French lodges.³⁷ Fortunately, the Heureuse Rencontre lodge possessed what they called a “literary chest” (*armoire littéraire*): books purchased or received as gifts for lodge use. Unlike the case of Carlo Ginzburg's

³³ Kenneth Loiselle, “Living the Enlightenment in an Age of Revolution: Freemasonry in Bordeaux (1788–1794),” *French History* 24 (2010): 64–66; Francis Masgnaud, *Franc-maçonnerie et Francs-maçons en Aunis et Saintonge sous l'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (La Rochelle, 1989), 307–52.

³⁴ During the Old Regime, musicians and artists comprised 10 percent of membership in Brestois lodges. Guengant, *Brest et la Franc-maçonnerie*, 30.

³⁵ José A. Ferrer Benimeli, “Le binôme Franc-maçonnerie-Révolution à l'époque des Lumières: Entre histoire et mythification,” in “Franc-maçonnerie et politique au siècle des Lumières: Europe-Amériques,” ed. Cécile Révauger, *Lumières* 7 (2006): 45.

³⁶ Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996), 206–9. On trust networks generally, see Charles Tilly, *Trust and Rule* (Cambridge, 2005), 43–45.

³⁷ Daniel Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 436.

Domenico Scandella or those eighteenth-century British readers who assiduously recorded their reading habits in commonplace books or diaries, we do not have documentation revealing precisely how these Brestois Masons read the books they placed into their library. And yet brethren clearly approved of and used them during their meetings, as they read aloud passages from texts and sent delegates to thank those individuals who donated works.³⁸ Brethren mentioned eighteen specific titles added to this modest library from 1784 to 1790, and this is undoubtedly a partial list of what they read since members presumably had been acquiring books since *Heureuse Rencontre*'s establishment in the 1740s:

1. [Anon.], *Apologie de la resolution du fameux cas-de-conscience* (1704)
2. Pierre Barral, *Dictionnaire portatif, historique, théologique, géographique, critique et moral de la Bible* (1756)
3. Balthasar Bekker, *Le monde enchanté* (1694)
4. Père Beritau (Ange de la Passion), *Le Disciple pacifique de saint Augustin sur la liberté, la grâce et la predestination* (1715–29)
5. François Bernier, *Abrégé de l'examen de Gassendi sur la morale des anciens* (1678)
6. Étienne Binet, *Quel est le meilleur gouvernement, le rigoureux ou le doux?* (1636)
7. Augustin Calmet, *Dictionnaire historique, critique, chronologique, géographique et littéral de la Bible* (1783 edition)
8. Marquis Caraccioli, *Le Vritable Mentor ou l'éducation de la noblesse* (1759)
9. Pierre Collot, *L'Esprit de saint François de Sales* (1727)
10. *Le Concile de Trente* (date unknown)
11. Joseph-Antoine Dinouart, *Abrégé de l'embryologie sacrée* (1774 edition)
12. Jacques Joseph Duguet, *Explication du livre de la Sagesse* (1755)
13. Jacques-André Émery, *L'Esprit de Sainte-Thérèse* (1775)
14. Antoine Franc, *Méthode pratique pour converser avec Dieu* (1721)
15. Nicholas Lenglet Du Fresnoy, ed., *Réfutation des erreurs de Benoît de Spinoza* (1731)
16. Auguste Hespelle, *La seule véritable religion, démontrée contre les athées, les déistes & tous les sectaires* (1774)
17. Félix Lioy, *Histoire de la persécution intentée en 1775 aux francs-maçons de Naples, suivie de pièces justificatives* (1780)
18. Claude-François Nonnotte, *Dictionnaire philosophique de la religion* (1772)

³⁸ The itemized books were mentioned in meetings from May 1784 (ADF MS 40 J 3, fol. 76) to August 1790 (ADF MS 40 J 4, fol. 98v).

What is immediately striking about this list is the prevalence of religious texts. That group spans a period roughly from 1725 to 1775 and represents a diverse group of writers that included Jansenists (Barral and Duguet), Jesuits (Binet, Franc and Nonnotte), secular clergy (Collot, Dinouart and Hespelle), and regular clergy (Beritau, Calmet, and Émery), as well as laymen (Bernier and Du Fresnoy) and a single Protestant (Bekker). In its eclectic choice of authors, *Heureuse Rencontre* was an institutional manifestation of what Jeffrey Burson has called the “late Catholic Enlightenment” in prerevolutionary France that moved beyond earlier doctrinal tensions—between Jesuit and Jansenist camps, for example—in order to defend Catholic Christianity against the rising tide of anticlerical *philosophie*.³⁹

It is worth noting at the outset that two of these texts do not fit with the overall group: Binet’s manual for superiors of religious houses (which brethren may possibly have used as a model for regulating their own assemblies) and Lioy’s popular account of recent masonic persecution in Naples.⁴⁰ The remaining volumes intersected with the Catholic Enlightenment in a variety of ways. Like the Jesuit editors of the *Mémoires de Trévoux*, who embraced certain advances in natural history as well as in the medical and agricultural sciences because they helped reveal the workings of God’s laws and improved the well-being of ordinary people, so too did Joseph-Antoine Dinouart hope to make science an instrument of faith.⁴¹ His work was an abridged and updated version of Francesco-Emanuele Cangiarnila’s treatise on embryology, and it furnished the reader with anatomical diagrams, step-by-step instructions on how to perform a caesarean section, and successful case studies. He presented his work as a fruitful dialogue between faith and science in which the “principles of theology [are] methodologically united to anatomical and surgical knowledge” that could serve as a practical guide whose ultimate aim was to facilitate the baptism of a living fetus from a deceased mother.⁴²

³⁹ Jeffrey Burson, “The Catholic Enlightenment in France from the Fin de Siècle Crisis of Consciousness to the Revolution, 1650–1789,” in Lehner and Printy, *A Companion to the Catholic Enlightenment*, 106–15.

⁴⁰ Lioy, a Freemason, was warmly received in French masonic circles. The Parisian brethren of Amis Réunis (Reunited Friends), for example, lauded him as a “great defender of the Royal Art.” Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds maçonnique (hereafter BN), FM² 44, fols. 44–47.

⁴¹ Christian Albertan, “Entre foi et sciences: Les Mémoires de Trévoux et le mouvement scientifique dans les années 50,” *Dix-huitième siècle* 34 (2002): 91–97. On the embrace of the new science in the French Catholic Enlightenment, see Burson, “Catholic Enlightenment in France,” 73–74, 83, 88, 111.

⁴² Joseph-Antoine Dinouart, *Abrégé de l’embryologie sacrée* . . . (Nyon, 1774), vii.

A number of authors in the lodge's library also were united in the Catholic Enlightenment's promotion of a Christian faith that embraced a rational, simplified, and individualistic piety that sharply opposed heterodoxy.⁴³ Although attacks on deism, atheism, and materialism could be found in many of the works owned by Heureuse Rencontre, Du Fresnoy, Hespelle, and Nonotte were the most vocal critics. These clerical apologists did not simply condemn Enlightenment philosophy for spreading incredulity but also attacked it for transgressing their own modern intellectual criteria of scholarship and argumentation. Nonotte, for example, who had been sharpening his quill for use against Voltaire since the 1750s, criticized the *philosophe* in his *Dictionnaire philosophique de la religion* for not furnishing any concrete evidence that Chinese history stretched back as far as Voltaire had claimed in his own 1764 *Dictionnaire*. "Undoubtedly," Nonotte wryly comments, "Voltaire has seen [Chinese] books, monuments, statues, and paintings stretching back 4000 years. . . . He must have an exclusive right to do so since no other writer has been as privileged as he."⁴⁴ Hespelle, in a similar vein, dismissed atheists (mentioning Spinoza and d'Holbach by name) as advocating systems that "revolt reason" where random chance has somehow produced the well-ordered natural world. Such a line of reasoning, he maintained, would be as absurd as to expect a perfectly composed version of Virgil's *Aeneid* to result from tossing letters haphazardly into the air.⁴⁵ The brethren of Heureuse Rencontre also read the lay equivalent of Hespelle and Nonotte in Caraccioli's popular educational treatise *Le Véritable Mentor*, which censured the skeptics and anticlericals of the Enlightenment as peddling an "alleged philosophy" that was rife with "fastidiously ridiculous jargon" and "sophisms."⁴⁶

Although the authors in the lodge's collection were critical of both the moderate and radical variants of Enlightenment thought, they were also uncomfortable with certain aspects of popular devotion. The work of Dutch minister and critic of Spinoza, Balthasar Bekker, urged the adoption of a Christianity free of irrational beliefs like demonic possession and witchcraft, and this position was taken up by Catholic Enlighteners the following century. A similar message could be found in Hespelle's *La seule véritable religion*, where he explained that it was imperative to shape one's faith solely according to scripture since "the Gospel has given us . . . ideas that are infinitely superior to those that we might create. . . . Revelation [is] exempt from all error, superior to all the

⁴³ Jeffrey Burson, "Introduction: Catholicism and Enlightenment, Past, Present, and Future," in Burson and Lehner, *Enlightenment and Catholicism in Europe*, 16–17.

⁴⁴ Charles-François Nonotte, *Dictionnaire philosophique de la religion* (1772), 1:140.

⁴⁵ Auguste Hespelle, *La seule véritable religion* . . . (Paris, 1774), 1:19–23.

⁴⁶ Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli, *Le véritable mentor; ou L'éducation de la noblesse* (Liège, 1759), 263–64, 268.

inventions of man.”⁴⁷ Duguet adopted a similar perspective in his *Explication du livre de la Sagesse*, where he too invited his readers to anchor their Catholicism in biblical exegesis. Brethren also owned the reference works of Barral and Calmet, which undoubtedly were of great assistance in understanding the cast of biblical characters, places, and episodes they encountered during the performance and study of rituals, especially those beyond Mastership. By inviting the faithful to engage individually with scripture (especially the Gospels), these books resonated with the theme stressed by both Catholic Enlighteners and Freemasonry—as we will see below in the Rosy Cross rite—of cultivating a personal relationship to Christ. Cleaving to the person of Jesus is a theme that also runs through the mystical work of Antoine Franc, *Méthode pratique pour converser avec Dieu*. He urged self-abandonment to Christ through brief prayers (*aspirations*) proclaimed throughout the day, such as the following: “Jesus, my Savior! Jesus, my love! Jesus, my hope, my consolation and my life! Jesus, my tender Jesus! I throw myself into your arms; receive me with kindness and according to the movements of your heart.”⁴⁸

The texts owned by Heureuse Rencontre thus encouraged a familiar, almost conversational encounter between God and man, and the lodge’s collection also held books that criticized any efforts to infringe upon this intimacy. The anonymous *Apologie de la résolution du fameux cas-de-conscience* was an anthology of pieces supporting the position of forty theologians from the Sorbonne who challenged the papal condemnation of Jansenism. It is true that the idea of a French Church independent from Rome can be traced back to the early sixteenth century, but the Jansenist controversies from the mid-seventeenth century onward amplified the theme of papal despotism.⁴⁹ In summary, theologians of the Sorbonne in 1701 found it acceptable that a dying ecclesiastic receive the last rites even if he doubted that the five propositions—centered around matters of salvation and grace—that were condemned in Innocent X’s 1656 *Cum occasione* were actually found within Cornelius Jansen’s *Augustinus* (1640). The editor of the anthology praised the Sorbonne for refusing to recognize that “a holy Bishop [Jansen] . . . had taught heretical or impious doctrines” and for showing the faithful that “no Catholic is required to blindly submit his judgment to his Superiors regarding all matters of fact.”⁵⁰ Did possession of this book mean brethren had Jansenist leanings in religion or politics? Identifying

⁴⁷ Andrew Fix, “Bekker and Spinoza,” in *Disguised and Overt Spinozism around 1700*, ed. Wiep van Bunge and Wim Klever (Leiden, 1996), 23–40; Hespelle, *La seule véritable religion*, 1:254–55.

⁴⁸ Antoine Franc, *Méthode pratique pour converser avec Dieu* (Lyon, 1735), 475.

⁴⁹ Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment*, 17–18, 19–25, 49–53.

⁵⁰ *Apologie de la résolution du fameux cas-de-conscience* (Cologne, 1704), 3, 5. On this affair, see Bernard Quilliet, *L’Acharnement théologique: Histoire de la grâce en Occident (IIIe–XXIe siècle)* (Paris, 2007), chap. 21.

a clear “Jansenist” position on these matters is inherently complicated because the movement was never monolithic, and those associated with Jansenism typically shied away from being labeled as anything other than loyal Catholics.⁵¹ There were a handful of Freemasons associated with Jansenism, such as parlementaire Louis Davy de La Fautrière, who joined one of the first Parisian lodges in the 1730s and whose antimaterialist writings appealed to a wide audience, including Jesuits.⁵² Some Jansenists also empathized with Freemasonry because of the papal bulls leveled against both organizations, and the weekly *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques* published an article a few years before the Revolution suggesting that since Louis XVI approved of lodges, Masons posed no threat to either altar or throne.⁵³

But as an organization, Freemasonry differed greatly from Jansenism in terms of its conception of human nature. Whereas the latter held that humankind was mired in a permanent postlapsarian state of corruption that made God’s grace absolutely necessary for salvation, the entire masonic project from its inception was based on the optimistic belief that people could themselves create the conditions necessary to derive some form of temporal happiness. “We are Free Masons,” declared an orator in the 1740s, “which means, for those that understand, [we are] artisans of our own happiness.”⁵⁴ Like the Jesuits, Freemasons saw humankind not as inherently depraved but rather as victims of a morally corrupt social world.⁵⁵ Within the lodge, a Mason could choose and turn toward the virtuous, leaving behind, as one midcentury orator put it, the “chaos” and “habitat of corruption” of everyday life.⁵⁶ Masons believed that within the controlled setting of the lodge, it was possible for individuals to improve themselves morally and in turn to perfect the nonmasonic “profane” world.⁵⁷ This perspective likely

⁵¹ David Bell, *Lawyers and Citizens: The Making of a Political Elite in Old Regime France* (Oxford, 1994), 70.

⁵² Pierre Chevallier, *Les Ducs sous l’Acacia ou les premiers pas de la Franc-maçonnerie française, 1725–43*, 2nd ed. (Geneva, 1994), 276.

⁵³ *Nouvelles ecclésiastiques, ou Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire de la constitution Unigenitus* (1786), 111.

⁵⁴ “Discours prononcé en loge pour l’instruction des frères,” in *Le Parfait Maçon: Les Débuts de la maçonnerie française (1736–1748)*, ed. Johel Coutura (Saint-Etienne, 1994), 181.

⁵⁵ R. R. Palmer, *Catholics & Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Princeton, NJ, 1939), chap. 2.

⁵⁶ Chevalier Scriblerus, *Devine si tu peux, ou Discours prononcé dernièrement dans une assemblée de Franc-maçons* (London [most likely Paris], 1744), a2. For similar statements, see *Discours prononcé en loge, par un franc-maçon, nouvellement élevé à la dignité d’orateur* (n.p., 1755), 5; Jarrhetti, *L’Orateur Franc-Maçon*, 20–21.

⁵⁷ Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment*, 52–60; Kenneth Loiselle, *Brotherly Love: Freemasonry and Male Friendship in Enlightenment France* (Ithaca, NY, 2014), 36.

also explains why brethren of *Heureuse Rencontre* owned Bernier's introduction to Gassendi's ethics, since the latter stressed in a similar way that the hallmark of human beings is their ability to rationally choose to strive toward happiness and the good. In a view similar to the Jesuit and masonic positions, Gassendi saw free will as central to his ethics, and he subsequently rejected any notion of predestination.⁵⁸ In addition to this incompatibility between masonic and Jansenist notions of the self, *Heureuse Rencontre*'s library possessed two books that strongly suggest that brethren did not endorse Jansenism and were instead more attracted to the orthodox message of the Church. First, the lodge kept a copy of what was likely a compendium of the rulings of the Council of Trent, which the lodge secretary simply labeled "*Le Concile de Trente*."⁵⁹ They also owned *Le Disciple pacifique de saint Augustin*, in which Father Beritau attempted to rehabilitate the early church father's views on free will in light of the close association of Augustine with Jansenist fatalism by the late seventeenth century. Mentioning Jansenius and Antoine Arnauld by name throughout the text, he accused Jansenists of religious "subterfuges" and a deliberate misreading of Augustine's theology.⁶⁰ Although there seems to have been little ideological affinity between Freemasonry and Jansenism, *Heureuse Rencontre*'s possession of the *Apologie* anthology does nevertheless suggest that both groups—perhaps because of their shared history of persecution at the hands of the Vatican—cherished individual liberty in matters of religious conscience. Such a view was reflective of a wider Catholic Enlightenment critique of papal overreach in local religious affairs and thus was neither uniquely Jansenist nor masonic.⁶¹

The final category of texts in the lodge's library were those devoted to the lives of Saint Francis (Collot) and Saint Teresa (Émery). Hagiographical encomiums of saints had been well established in France since the beginning of the early modern period, and the Church continuously recommended them as vital reading material.⁶² In both print and image, Catholic Enlighteners—such as the painter Pierre Subleyras—reworked this panegyric tradition by placing particular emphasis not on the supernatural intercourse these holy individuals had with God, but rather on the virtuous deeds they performed on behalf of the common

⁵⁸ Lisa Sarasohn, "The Ethical and Political Philosophy of Pierre Gassendi," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 20 (1982): 239–60. On the Jesuit view, see Burson, "Catholic Enlightenment in France," 73.

⁵⁹ It is possible that this book was *Le Catéchisme du Concile de Trente*, which had been reprinted numerous times since the late seventeenth century.

⁶⁰ Père Ange de la Passion [Beritau], *Le Disciple pacifique de saint Augustin sur la liberté, la grâce et la prédestination* (Paris, 1715), esp. 227–32.

⁶¹ Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment*, 10, 17–19, 99.

⁶² John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, vol. 2, *The Religion of the People and the Politics of Religion* (Oxford, 1998), 199.

good.⁶³ This utilitarian shift is especially visible in Émery's edited volume of the writings of sixteenth-century mystic Teresa of Ávila. He laments that too often she had been misunderstood as an otherworldly figure whose writings were inaccessible to the wider public. Although he concedes that at times her language could be opaque and her presentation disorganized, his aim was to move beyond this "prejudice" and rehabilitate her image as a model leader whose pragmatism helped forge the Church's sixteenth-century renewal. Émery included, for example, over sixty of her private letters to allies and subordinates in order to highlight her patient perseverance and skillful diplomacy in establishing reformed Carmelite houses throughout Spain.⁶⁴

Although this case study of masonic reading material is limited to one lodge in Brittany, evidence from elsewhere strongly suggests that Freemasons across the kingdom shared similar religious sensibilities. By the 1780s, brethren were anxiously writing one another about the spread of the "irreligious system of natural religion" and expressing their hope that Masonry could counter its proliferation.⁶⁵ In 1784 during the inauguration of a new lodge in Semur, a Dijonnais master celebrated the authentic Mason as a "true Christian" and decried "those blasphemers who dare question and deny the Supreme Being and his works because they can't understand them. . . . Let these dangerous philosophes who establish the reign of lies stay far away from us."⁶⁶ Even in Paris, the capital of the French Enlightenment, men in various lodges spoke out clearly against *philosophie* during the prerevolutionary decades. One decried atheism as "punishment for scientific pride" and mocked the "beaux esprits" of the century for solipsistic pedanticism that caused the public to "snore while listening to them, [and] fall asleep while reading them."⁶⁷ During an April 1777 speech in front of his lodge, Céleste Amitié (Celestial Friendship), surgeon Charles-Daniel Gaultier de Claubry condemned "the philosophes of our century" for having created "depraved systems whose foundation is pride, whose goal is vanity, whose proof are

⁶³ David Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), chap. 4; Christopher Johns, *The Visual Culture of Catholic Enlightenment* (University Park, PA, 2015), chap. 2; Lehner, "The Many Faces of the Catholic Enlightenment," 25; Mario Rosa, *Settecento religioso: Politica della ragione e religione del cuore* (Venice, 1999), chap. 2.

⁶⁴ Jacques-André Émery, *L'Esprit de sainte Thérèse, recueilli de ses œuvres et de ses lettres, avec ses opuscules* . . . (Lyon, 1775), 21–40, 303–496.

⁶⁵ BML MS 5867 pièce 46, letter from Charles de Salm to Jean-Baptiste Willermoz (February 10, 1784).

⁶⁶ *Planche à tracer de la cérémonie de l'inauguration de la [Loge] . . . de la Bonne foi* (1784), 23.

⁶⁷ Speech of Louis-Sébastien Mercier at Neuf Soeurs lodge at some point between 1778 and 1783, reprinted as "Soyons maçons et point académiciens," in *Renaissance traditionnelle* 13 (1973): 20–27.

contradictions and whose fruit are lies and illusions.” De Claubry likely was railing against the materialists here, since later in his speech he dismissed the notion that humans are “organized machines” as “stupidly imagined.”⁶⁸ De Claubry’s critique amplified the message of contemporaneous Catholic apologists like Sulpician Bertrand de Latour, who five years earlier had appealed in print to men of medicine like de Claubry to reject materialism by marrying deep piety to scientific research. Otherwise, de Latour lamented, the result would be the erection of “wicked systems, haphazard guesses, false observations, frivolous reasoning, [and] so-called secrets.”⁶⁹

Parisian orators were in fact reluctant to invoke any modern authors at all, but instead tended in their lodges to draw either from scripture or from classical antiquity. The secretary of the Zèle (Zeal) lodge in Paris recorded, for example, 120 discourses and songs (*cantiques*) that were delivered on various occasions from 1780 to 1782.⁷⁰ Of the 110 identifiable authors in these texts, only 14 percent were writers from the eighteenth century, and only d’Alembert (one reference) and Voltaire (one reference) can be considered part of the *philosophe* flock. Furthermore, the female Mason who mentioned both of these men during an adoption lodge—a meeting of both men and women—was not interested in either man’s religious positions, but rather used them as examples of writers who respected female intellect.⁷¹ When Zèle’s Masons did dip into their own century’s books, they drew mostly from popular historians like Charles Rollin (two references) or writers more closely aligned to the counter-Enlightenment such as Madame de Genlis (two references), who was praised for her morals and elegant style, and lauded as one of the “illustrious women . . . at the end of this century.”⁷² Besides this discomfort with heterodoxy, other Freemasons in France also shared Heureuse Rencontre’s interest in the Church’s mystical tradition, commenting on and mailing each other the works of Teresa of Ávila, Sans de Sainte-Catherine, and Madame Guyon.⁷³ Lodges, along with some convents and certain Jesuit circles, therefore were spaces where this form of

⁶⁸ BN FM² 44 (La Céleste Amitié), fols. 28v–29.

⁶⁹ Bertrand de la Tour, *Œuvres de M. L’Abbé de la Tour* (Cologne, 1772), 15:59.

⁷⁰ A list of Zèle’s speeches and songs can be found at Bibliothèque municipale d’Albi (hereafter BMAB) MS 121 (154), fols. 357–68.

⁷¹ Speech of Sister Boudet (February 24, 1781), BMAB MS 121 (153), fol. 389. The women mentioned were Émilie du Châtelet (Voltaire) and Julie de Lespinasse (d’Alembert).

⁷² Speech of Louis Fontaine de St. Freville (April 8, 1780), BMAB MS 121 (153), fol. 62. On Genlis’s anti-*philosophe* views, see Darrin McMahon, *Enemies of the Enlightenment: The French Counter-Enlightenment and the Making of Modernity* (Oxford, 2001), chap. 1.

⁷³ BML MS 5425, pièce 52 (October 6, 1810); BML MS 5867, pièce 16 (undated, 1784).

spirituality continued to find expression in eighteenth-century France, despite the considerable controversy it had generated at the end of the reign of Louis XIV.⁷⁴

BECOMING CHRIST IN THE LODGE: THE ROSY CROSS

The mystical writings found in *Heureuse Rencontre*'s library and elsewhere stressed the centrality of Christ to religious life, and brethren throughout the eighteenth century understood the masonic experience as a means to become closer to the person and ethical precepts of Jesus. An "ever more perfect union between myself and our Lord Jesus Christ" was how Danish Prince Charles de Hesse-Kassel described the masonic experience to his long-time correspondent Jean-Baptiste Willermoz in 1786.⁷⁵ This Christocentrism served as the basis for the mutual understanding between Catholic and Protestant brethren because it was anchored in the Gospels, texts that any Christian could unproblematically embrace. Willermoz, himself a devout Catholic, explained to a Lutheran brother from Strasbourg, Bernard de Turckheim, that "no matter what Christian community" one might belong to, faith in Christ and the "law of the Gospels" is the "true gate of salvation."⁷⁶ Besides highlighting this soteriological message, lodges also looked to Jesus as a teacher of ethics, and thus saw in the Gospels a roadmap for ideal behavior between men. In early 1765, the officers of the Parisian Saint-Louis de la Martinique des Frères Unis urged a faction of their membership to put aside their disputes over the leadership of the lodge, and to heed the words of Matthew 18:15, "If your brother sins against you, rebuke him and if he repents, pardon him."⁷⁷ Nearly two decades later, Parisian lawyer Ambroise Falconnet echoed a similar conception of the Gospels when he proclaimed during a packed St. John's Day banquet that it was in scripture that he believed to have recognized the "clearest evidence of Masonry and the closest conformity with our doctrine." It was especially Christ's call for unconditional love between his disciples that Falconnet recognized as most relevant to the fraternity, asking "Is there anyone else besides us who is better suited for such precepts?"⁷⁸

As Pierre Mollier and Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire have noted, the most Christocentric ritual within Old Regime Freemasonry was the Rosy Cross.⁷⁹ The

⁷⁴ Jacques Le Brun, "Entre la mystique et la morale," *Dix-huitième siècle* 8 (1976): 43–66.

⁷⁵ BML MS 5869, pièce 23 (March 18, 1786).

⁷⁶ BML MS 5868, pièce 70 (December 10, 1785).

⁷⁷ GODF MS AR 113.2.96, fol. 37 (January 1765).

⁷⁸ BMAB MS 121 (153), fols. 99–100 (June 24, 1781 banquet).

⁷⁹ Pierre Mollier, "Le grade maçonnique de Rose-croix et le Christianisme: Enjeux et pouvoirs des symboles," in *1804–2004: Deux siècles de Rite Ecossais Ancien Accepté*

Rosy Cross appeared in Strasbourg in 1760, Lyon in 1763, and soon spread to Bordeaux, Brest, La Rochelle, Marseille, Metz, Lyon, and Toulouse. By the end of the 1760s, a central organization had emerged in Paris to regulate the rite's rapid diffusion, and by the end of the century brethren in small locales like the northern fortress town of Aire-sur-la-Lys participated in this degree.⁸⁰ This rite was a part of a set of additional rituals that lay beyond the three standard degrees—Apprenticeship, Fellowcraft, and Mastership—that were known as “Scottish,” “higher,” or “side” degrees.⁸¹ Rites of the higher degrees were performed in special lodge meetings known as “chapters” that met separately from the standard “blue lodge” gatherings where brethren participated in the first three degrees.

Within these chapters, brethren creatively invented and adapted a congeries of rituals, which were first systematically inventoried in the 1766 work of Messin parliamentarian and lodge master Théodore de Tschoudy. He identified over forty degrees beyond the Mastership whose appellations suggested influence from a variety of sources, most notably from esotericism.⁸² The Knight of the Sun degree, for example, creatively blended esoteric and Christian references, representing the Virgin Mary as the “purity of nature,” a cryptic allusion that pointed both to the standard Christian idea that the immaculate conception spared Mary from the postlapsarian state of humankind and to the occultist

en France, ed. Alain de Keghel and Bernard Moisy (Paris, 2004), 170–93; Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire, *Jésus dans la tradition maçonnique: Rituels et symbolismes du Christ dans la franc-maçonnerie française* (Paris, 2003), 196–200.

⁸⁰ Although their semantic affinity led both contemporaries and later scholars—such as Lacordaire—to draw a link between the Rosy Cross and the Rosicrucian fraternity from the seventeenth century, no evidence supports the existence of a French Rosy Cross degree before the middle of the eighteenth century: Paul Monod, *Solomon's Secret Arts: The Occult in the Age of Enlightenment* (New Haven, CT, 2013), 113. On the diffusion of the Rosy Cross in France from 1760 to the Revolution, see Henrik Bogdan, *Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation* (Albany, NY, 2007), 106; Gérard Gayot, “Les problèmes de la double appartenance: Protestants et francs-maçons à Sedan au XVIII^e siècle,” *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine* 18 (1971): 421; Albert Ladret, *Le grand siècle de la Franc-maçonnerie: La Franc-maçonnerie lyonnaise au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1976), 318; Paul Naudon, *Histoire et rituels des hauts grades maçonniques: Le rite écossais ancien et accepté* (Paris, 1966), 66; Jan Snoek, “On the Creation of Masonic Degrees: A Method and Its Fruits,” in *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, ed. Antoine Faivre and Wouter Hanegraaff (Leuven, 1998), 174.

⁸¹ Despite its name, the group of degrees beyond Mastership were most certainly not of Scottish provenance. Why French brethren described these rituals in this way remains unknown. Ran Halévi, *Les loges maçonniques dans la France d'Ancien Régime: Aux origines de la sociabilité démocratique* (Paris, 1984), 92–96.

⁸² Théodore-Henry baron de Tschoudy, *L'Étoile flamboyante ou la société des francs-maçons considérée sous tous les aspects* (Paris, 1766), 1:173–78.

belief that everything was ultimately derived from a single divine substance.⁸³ This esoteric concept that God and his creations were consubstantial also could be found in Martinism, a doctrine to which masonic circles in Lyon and elsewhere were attracted.⁸⁴ Scholars such as David Harvey have noted that this belief constituted a fundamental departure from the Judeo-Christian understanding that the divine and temporal realms were ontologically distinct.⁸⁵ The Knight of the Sun degree also intermingled alchemical and standard Christian themes when it described Christ as both “a new King, full of glory” and as the “Alkahest,” which was the term transmutational alchemists used to refer to a universal solvent in which all matter dissolved.

It is difficult to know if most Freemasons were uncomfortable with such unorthodox ideas or even aware that they could be found within some higher degrees, since they readily associated standard Christian symbolism with the chapters in which these rituals were performed. This is evident in looking at the official chapter seals, which were similar to those personal devices (*devises*) commonly used by Old Regime cultural elites to align themselves with a particular virtue, animal, or meaningful event.⁸⁶ The chapter seal functioned as a visual marker of a group’s collective identity, as it was impressed on all official documentation—correspondence, certificates, etc.—with the Grand Orient and other lodges. Within the Grand Orient’s collection of official lodge seals, all chapters in Paris, all chapters of military lodges, and over 90 percent of provincial chapters had seals bearing Christian motifs.⁸⁷ This imagery included a resurrected Christ emerging from his tomb, the Christ from the book of Revelation represented as a lamb surrounded by the seven seals, Christ represented as a Pelican, as well as crosses of various sizes and dimensions often adorned with the rose of Mary. As we shall see shortly, a number of these symbols were drawn directly from the Rosy Cross rite, which alludes to the importance of this degree to masonic identity. Although occultist imagery and cosmology could be found within some of the higher degrees, it appears that brethren generally considered these references to be complementary rather than at odds with Catholic teachings.

⁸³ Bibliothèque municipale d’Avignon (hereafter BMAV) MS 3085, fols. 34–43; Pierre Mollier, “Le Chevalier du Soleil: Contribution à l’étude d’un haut-grade maçonnique en France au XVIIIe siècle” (DEA, La Sorbonne, 1992).

⁸⁴ Clark Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore, MD, 1975), 110–11; Auguste Viatte, *Les sources occultes du Romantisme* (Paris, 1928), 1:68–71, 2:63–71.

⁸⁵ David Allen Harvey, *Beyond Enlightenment: Occultism and Politics in Modern France* (Dekalb, IL, 2005), 19.

⁸⁶ Laurence Grove, *Emblematics and Seventeenth-Century French Literature: Descartes, Tristan, La Fontaine, and Perrault* (Charlottesville, VA, 2000), chap. 1.

⁸⁷ “Sceaux des loges de la correspondance du Grand Orient au XVIIIe siècle,” BN FM1 314–17.

A closer look at the Rosy Cross is warranted not only because it echoed religious themes similar to those found in *Heureuse Rencontre*'s library books, but also because the lodge's membership identified this degree as a significant step in one's life as a Mason. The historian is able to see just how much the Rosy Cross meant to these men by paying attention to the visual or textual markers that often accompanied members' signatures at the conclusion of each lodge meeting. From 1780 to 1788, members of and visitors to *Heureuse Rencontre* signed the rolls 12,534 times, and slightly more than half (55 percent) of these signatures bore some type of visual or textual embellishment. Over half (57 percent) of these instances referred to the rank of the Rosy Cross (fig. 1), usually with the acronym SPRC, which meant "Sovereign Prince of the Rosy Cross"; some markings replaced the C with an image of a cross. The remaining portion of signature enhancements were divided up among various degrees, each of which never comprised more than 10 percent of total markers.⁸⁸ This did not reflect the membership profile, as only 34 percent of *Heureuse Rencontre* members had attained the Rosy Cross degree during the 1780s.

The predominance of the Rosy Cross embellishment alongside the signatures of brethren in *Heureuse Rencontre* underlines the significance of this degree. Its importance in the minds of Masons is understandable since it was the terminus of the masonic ritual journey for lodges in Brest and elsewhere.⁸⁹ Within *Heureuse Rencontre* during the 1780s, only 38 percent of the thirty-four eligible brethren acquired the final Rosy Cross degree. Though failure to advance obviously could reflect a man's lack of interest or time, there is evidence from the more informative chapter register of the nearby *Élus de Sully* (Elect of Sully) establishment that this rank demanded a more rigorous vetting process. This other Bretois lodge rejected over 20 percent of Rosy Cross candidates from 1786 to 1790; the secretary sometimes simply noted that a candidate was "non-admissible for the moment" or cryptically remarked that a man was "not yet of age."⁹⁰ Lodges restricted access to the Rosy Cross degree because they saw it as a new path in the ritual life of a Mason, quite similar to the rupture new brethren made with French society at large when they became initiated into the fraternity. Like the candidate who first stepped across the lodge's threshold to become initiated as a lowly Apprentice, Rosy Cross initiands also performed gestures of symbolic separation from their previous existence, specifically ritual washing and enclosing oneself

⁸⁸ The English and Irish Master registered the fewest markers (137) while the third degree of Mastership registered the highest, with 287 (7 percent of the total).

⁸⁹ The minutes for the *Élus de Sully* Rosy Cross chapter can be found in ADF MS 40 J 32. On the importance of the Rosy Cross more generally, see Gayot, "Les problèmes de la double appartenance," 421; René Le Forestier, *La Franc-maçonnerie templière et occultiste aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1987), 1:60–63.

⁹⁰ ADF MS 40 J 32.

The image shows two handwritten signatures in black ink. The first signature on the left is 'J. T. R. C.' followed by a large, stylized flourish. The second signature on the right is 'J. P. D. R. C.' followed by a more complex and elaborate flourish that includes a large loop and a cross-like shape.

FIG. 1.—Typical signature embellishments of Rosy-Cross Masons. Courtesy of Archives départementales du Finistère (ADF MS 40 J).

in a small room known as a reflection chamber.⁹¹ Because brethren prized this degree as “the last degree of Masonic perfection”—as one Savoyard lodge put it on the eve of the Revolution—it is worthwhile to examine in detail this ritual’s words, gestures, and actions in order to form a clearer picture of the Craft’s central touchstones in the eighteenth century.⁹²

After having spent an unspecified amount of time inside a reflection chamber, the candidate for the Rosy Cross received word from the so-called *Frère Terrible* (Dreadful Brother)—a lodge member whose task was to escort and, at times, intimidate candidates—that “the temple of God has been destroyed by the profane.” Within the lodge, meanwhile, the master conveyed the same message to the membership, but found solace and encouragement in the fact that unspecified “new work” would soon begin. The *Frère Terrible* then escorted the candidate to the first of the two chambers where the ritual action was to unfold. This room was completely dark except for the dim flickering of thirty-three candles, and the lodge master and other Rosy Cross brethren were all clothed in black (as was the candidate) in order to transmit an atmosphere of mourning. The candidate approached the master who expanded upon the laconic statement the *Frère Terrible* had delivered earlier in the reflection chamber. “My brother,” he began, “confusion has arrived in our work. . . . The temple of Jehovah has been sullied, desecrated and neglected in Zion.” This explanation from the master suggests that in one sense the Rosy Cross initiation did not vary significantly from a number of previous higher degrees in that it too placed brethren within the backdrop of the history of the ancient Israelites. The degrees of the Knight of the East and the

⁹¹ Kenneth Loiselle, “‘Nouveaux mais vrais amis’: La Franc-maçonnerie et les rites de l’amitié au dix-huitième siècle,” *Dix-huitième siècle* 39 (2007): 303–18.

⁹² Archives départementales de la Savoie, MS 26 F 3, fol. 16. Among themselves, brethren typically referred to Freemasonry as “the Craft.” The unfolding of the Rosy Cross has been distilled from multiple discussions or ritual manuals from the 1760s until the early nineteenth century: GODF MS AR 113.1.58, fols. 15–17; BMAV MS 3080, fols. 69–89v; BMAV MS 3085, fols. 67–79, 85–117v; Ladret, *La Franc-maçonnerie lyonnaise*, 318–19, and Naudon, *Histoire et rituels des hauts grades*, 249–63. Like Lacordaire, I do not detect any significant variation of the degree from the 1760s down to the post-revolutionary period. On the reliability of such prescriptive material as reflective of actual lodge practice, see Loiselle, *Brotherly Love*, 51–53. All dialogue has been derived from these sources.

Prince of Jerusalem, for example, centered around the invention of a tradition that inscribed Freemasonry into a specific historical era of the Hebrew Bible, roughly from the building of Solomon's Temple (as recounted in Kings) to the restoration of Judean sovereignty in Palestine under Zerubbabel (as recounted in Ezra and elsewhere) during the sixth century BCE.⁹³ Freemasonry was obviously no longer relying on the Hebrew Bible in this case, however, since the master was referring to the account of the Roman destruction of the Second Temple that was recorded by Flavius Josephus, whose writings enjoyed a wide readership throughout the eighteenth century.⁹⁴

During this initial exchange with the master, the candidate learns of the "new law" that he is to follow in order to dispel the moral corruption that has led to the demise of the Temple. Ritual manuals explained to the master that "it is understood that this ['the new law'] is the Christian religion," and undoubtedly few brethren would have failed to associate the decoration and ritual action that followed with the teachings, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. As noted, the first room was lit by thirty-three candles that were partially obscured by a box around the candelabra, an obvious allegorical reference to "the years of Jesus Christ," and the candidate also traveled around the first chamber thirty-three times. The lodge officer escorting the candidate—usually the Master of Ceremonies or the Second Warden—pointed out ritual elements that illustrated "the beauties of the new law." Because the first chamber was meant to represent the moment of Jesus's death, its elaborate floor-cloth contained explicit references to the crucifixion. The accompanying officer drew the candidate's attention specifically to an abstract design of three triangles on top of which was situated a cubical stone that was "sweating water and blood which represents the son of man." This was intended to "represent the place of the Calvary," the site just outside of Jerusalem that Christian tradition identified with the crucifixion. One could also find on the floor-cloth Christ's final words before his death according to the Latin Vulgate, *Consummatum est* ("It is finished"), and the lodge master himself repeated the same expression in French to conclude the ceremonial in the first chamber: "tout est consommé."

Besides the floor-cloth, there were also three columns in the first chamber placed at different corners of the room: the word "faith" can be found on the first column, "hope" on the second, and "charity" on the third. Upon completion of his journey, the candidate affirmed "the recognition of [these] three virtues to guide me forever more in the future." When he asked the master if there were other virtues to learn, the master responded negatively and stated that the "new mystery"

⁹³ See BMAV MS 3080, fol. 28 and BMAV MS 3083, fol. 69.

⁹⁴ Mireille Hadas-Label, "La lecture de Flavius Josèphe aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," in *La République des lettres et l'histoire du judaïsme antique XVIe–XVIIIe siècles*, ed. Chantal Grell and François Laplanche (Paris, 1992), 101–13.

simply required that he let these principles “always guide him.” Faith, hope, and charity were already praised in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, and Aquinas later elevated them to the status of core “theological virtues” of Christianity: faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ; hope in the return of the Messiah; and charity or love toward all of humanity. Freemasonry’s reiteration of this trio reflected the fact that the Thomist message had become commonplace in eighteenth-century France within all variants of French Catholicism, from the counter-Reformation authors of the diocesan catechisms to Jansenist writers.⁹⁵ The masonic effort within the Rosy Cross ritual to strip down Christianity to these core beliefs found within the New Testament reflected the Catholic Enlightenment’s efforts to “discern the essential core of Catholic teaching,” as Ulrich Lehner has observed.⁹⁶

By anchoring the Rosy Cross in simple precepts found in scripture, Freemasonry made Protestant participation in the ritual process comfortable and appealing. Protestants actively participated in lodge life and the higher degrees in cities like Bordeaux, Caen, La Rochelle, Marseille, and Sedan, and to a lesser degree in Le Havre and Rouen. Despite the fact that Brest was not a Huguenot center, Protestants were initiated into *Heureuse Rencontre* during the 1780s.⁹⁷ The Rosy Cross degree further recognized that Christians of all denominations were equal to one another, as the master continued to explain to the candidate in the first chamber that “Masons are all equal and name one another with the tender name of brother because Christians are all brethren in Jesus Christ. . . . All particular denominations form the universal church.” Although the term “universal church” often referred in Old Regime France to the papacy and councils, the Rosy Cross degree employed it in an explicitly ecumenical fashion to include all Christian creeds. Such an emphasis again reminds us that even within the more esoteric higher degrees, mainstream Freemasonry remained unwaveringly committed to a broad toleration among Christians, a core tenet of Catholic

⁹⁵ Karen Carter, “The Science of Salvation: French Diocesan Catechisms and Catholic Reform (1650–1800),” *Catholic Historical Review* 96 (2010): 234–61.

⁹⁶ Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment*, 9.

⁹⁷ A merchant from Amsterdam “professing the Protestant religion” was admitted on March 8, 1783, as was a Lutheran military officer the following year. ADF MS 40 J 3, fols. 9v and 63v. Nearby Élus de Sully lodge also initiated Protestants: ADF MS 40 J 18, unfoliated. On Protestants in French Masonry, see Pierre-Yves Beaurepaire, “Entre cosmopolitisme maçonnique et œcuménisme chrétien: Francs-maçons catholiques et protestants au XVIIIe siècle,” in *Protestantisme et franc-maçonnerie: De la tolérance religieuse à la religion de la tolérance?*, ed. Roger Dachez and Philippe Guglielmi (Paris, 2000), 109–24. For examples of extensive Protestant involvement in French lodges—including Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anglicans—see the meeting minutes of Étoile Flamboyante aux Trois Lys (Bordeaux) and Le Point Central/Centre Pacifique (Ile d’Oléron) at GODF MS AR 113.2.841 and Archives départementales de la Charente-Maritime MS 1 J 29, respectively.

Enlightenment figures like Abbé Bion and Joseph de Maistre, and one that French Masons continued to affirm down to the Revolution in public defenses of the Craft.⁹⁸

Catholics also felt comfortable with the Rosy Cross because there were many elements within its ceremonial that were specifically aligned with their denomination to such a degree that some brethren simply claimed that the Rosy Cross was “Catholicism put into ritual.”⁹⁹ When the candidate later entered the second chamber, the lodge master explained to him that the seven candelabra he saw there represented “the seven sacraments of the Church,” a clear reference to Catholic rites. Other conventional elements of Old Regime Catholic piety were also present, notably liturgical colors. Because the first chamber of the Rosy Cross rite was associated with Christ’s death, the candidate and other brethren wore black as an “image of our pain”; this was also the expected behavior of the faithful in confraternities to mark the crucifixion.¹⁰⁰ The second room moved the focus from the Savior’s death to his resurrection, and this was demonstrated most clearly by brethren—including the initiand—exchanging black masonic aprons for red ones. Freemasonry again borrowed here from the symbolic order of confraternities since this new color was meant to recall the sacrificial blood of Jesus, a connection made explicit in the imagery found on this room’s floor-cloth. The Master of Ceremonies highlighted the cross, of course, but also the figure of the pelican feeding its chicks (fig. 2), explaining to the candidate that “the son of man is also compared to the pelican who pierces its side in order to feed its young with its own blood and this image has a very sensible relationship to the sacrifice of the cross where the blood of the father of humanity was voluntarily spilt in order to save and nourish human nature.” Freemasons were not striking out in any new directions here since there was a long iconographical

⁹⁸ The Rosy Cross’s affirmation that “Christians are all brethren in Jesus Christ” lines up very closely with Bion’s declaration that Protestants were Catholics’ “separated brethren.” Plongeron, “Recherches sur l’‘Aufklärung’ catholique,” 580. De Maistre also envisioned Freemasonry as a palliative for Protestant-Catholic separation: Armenteros, “Joseph de Maistre,” 126. Examples of the many apologias that stressed masonic ecumenism include *Le Vrai Franc-Macon, qui donne l’origine et le but de la Franc-Maçonnerie* (1773), *Apologie des Francs-Maçons par le Frère ***** (1779), *Abrégé de l’histoire de la Franche-Maçonnerie* (1779), and *Les Francs-Maçons plaideurs* (1786). Explicit ecumenism in French Freemasonry dates at least back to the middle of the 1730s in the “Devoirs Enjoins aux Maçons Libres,” a set of guidelines for lodge conduct. Loisel, *Brotherly Love*, 71.

⁹⁹ Tschoudy, *Étoile flamboyante*, 1:199.

¹⁰⁰ McManners, *The Religion of the People and the Politics of Religion*, 172. Masonic borrowing of confraternal traditions likely was the result of the ever-increasing membership overlap between the two organizations during the second half of the eighteenth century. Agulhon, *Pénitents et francs-maçons de l’ancienne Provence*.



FIG. 2.—Detail of floor-cloth in second chamber of Rosy-Cross ritual. Courtesy of Bibliothèque municipale d'Avignon (BMAV MS 3085, fol. 82).

tradition stretching back to the medieval period that connected the Passion with the pelican.¹⁰¹

In inviting the candidate to become an *imitatio Christi* by forging a personal, visceral connection to Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, the Rosy Cross rite also amplified the Christocentric message found both in the writings of the Catholic Enlightenment and in Old Regime Catholic culture more broadly. An intense devotion centered around the life of Jesus could be found among parish missionaries like Grignon de Montfort, who early in the eighteenth century vividly evoked the trials and sufferings of Jesus in order to bring his listeners to repentance, and liturgical calendar reforms during the reign of Louis XV attempted to subordinate saints' days to Advent and Lent.¹⁰² The devotion to the

¹⁰¹ George Ferguson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art* (Oxford, 1961), 23; Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, vol. 2, *The Passion of Jesus Christ*, trans. Janet Seligman (New York, 1972), 136–37.

¹⁰² McManners, *The Religion of the People and the Politics of Religion*, 14, 48–49, 87, 106, 110. Grignon de Montfort's Marianism is also connected with masonic rituals like the Knight of the Sun that focused on the Immaculate Conception. BMAV MS 3085, fol. 41.

Sacred Heart, which grew in popularity throughout Catholic Europe in the eighteenth century and especially in France thanks in part to its having been so beloved by Queen Marie Leszczyńska and the Jesuits, also invited the faithful to emotively connect to the “kindness” and “tenderness” of Christ.¹⁰³ Furthermore, there are striking parallels between the manner in which the candidate and other lodge members were invited during the Rosy Cross ceremony to reenact or bear witness to the life and death of Jesus, and the pilgrimages ordinary Catholics undertook to makeshift Calvary monuments throughout eighteenth-century France. Brittany alone contained dozens of such structures and it is entirely possible that brethren from Heureuse Rencontre at some point made the quick trip over the Élorn river to visit the massive display of Christ’s crucifixion in Plougastel, which attracted thousands of visitors annually.¹⁰⁴ It has already been noted that in the first room each tour represented a year in Christ’s life, and that the candidate meditated on the Calvary scene as represented on the floor-cloth. In the second room, he completely adopted the identity of the Savior in his question-and-answer session with the lodge master; we learn here that the initiand originated from Judea and that he grew up in Nazareth. Masons considered the banquet following the ritual’s conclusion to be “indispensable” because it commemorated the well-known biblical episode where the resurrected Jesus shared a meal with his disciples after having met them on the road to Emmaus. It was now the lodge master’s turn to relive the life of Jesus by breaking bread and passing it around to brethren following the account in Luke.

At the end of the Rosy Cross ceremony, the lodge master rendered the entire ritual journey of Freemasonry more Christ-centered when he reworked the figure of Jesus into previous degrees that a candidate had already encountered. There was a particular focus on explaining the import of the third degree of Mastership, which was a critical rite of passage in the spiritual progression of a Mason because it represented both the terminus of the standard trigradal system and the gateway to the higher degrees.¹⁰⁵ At the center of Mastership lay the story of the assassination of Hiram Abiff, a fictional character who oversees the building of King Solomon’s Temple and who is loosely based on different figures of the same name found in the Hebrew Bible.¹⁰⁶ Refusing to divulge secret passwords

¹⁰³ Marie-Hélène Froeschle-Chopard, “La dévotion au Sacré-Coeur: Confréries et livres de piété,” *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 217 (2000): 531–46.

¹⁰⁴ One observer the following century considered this monument one of the “marvels of the region.” Christophe de la Poix Fréminville, *Antiquités du Finistère* (Brest, 1835), 2:176.

¹⁰⁵ One man in Avignon who reflected back on his long masonic career recognized Mastership as a watershed moment when he “felt that there existed something more than just useless and strange ceremonies.” BMAV MS 3077, fol. 177.

¹⁰⁶ Hiram is mentioned in Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. Snoek, “On the Creation of Masonic Degrees,” 151–59.

and hand gestures of his craft to workers who sought to earn a master's salary, Abiff is murdered and buried under an acacia tree. At the moment they pass through Mastership, candidates are instructed to see Hiram as a model Mason, notably because of his absolute steadfastness in upholding secrecy.¹⁰⁷ The story of Hiram has obvious parallels to the life of Christ, as they were both architects of God's work on Earth and were ultimately betrayed by close confidants. Freemasons in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries generally chose not to imbue Hiram's tragedy with Christic overtones, however. Jérôme Rousse-Lacordaire suggests that this likely reflected modern brethren's wish for various reasons to clearly demarcate Freemasonry from Christianity, and it also reflected the absence of any ritual material that actually connected the two figures.¹⁰⁸ Although the Hiram-Christ connection may have been missing from modern rituals, it was readily evoked in the Old Regime's Rosy Cross manuals. During the rite, the lodge master added another layer of meaning to Hiram's life and plight by associating them with the Passion. "It is time," he explained to the initiate, "to give you the explanation of all the symbolic mysteries of the death of Hiram and to show you the relationship it has with the death of the Messiah." He connects the three death blows Hiram received from his assailants to the three sufferings Christ endured under Pontius Pilate: physical violence, flagellation, and the crowning of thorns. It is further explained that when the Mastership candidate lay prone on the floor to symbolize a deceased Hiram, he was also reenacting Christ's death because the brethren who surrounded the candidate during the third degree were identified as "the image of the disciples who cried at the death of the Savior while at the foot of the cross."

We will never know exactly how clerical Freemasons thought about the Rosy Cross when they performed its rites; they surely would have recognized elements of scripture and the sacramental system of the Church in both the symbols encountered and the words exchanged between the initiate and lodge officers. Even clergy who were not part of the Craft recognized that masonic sociability held out the potential to fortify the faith; one "dignified priest" in the southeastern town of Vienne shared with a congregant who was a known Mason his sentiment that Freemasonry likely led to greater spiritual knowledge than the Catholic moral theology currently taught.¹⁰⁹ Those clergy who did become *frères* clearly understood their engagement as a project of moral improvement. The Cistercian monks who founded the Virtue lodge in the Clairvaux Abbey in the 1780s celebrated the day of the official affiliation of their organization to the Grand Orient as "exceedingly precious" since from that day forward they would be able to follow "all the

¹⁰⁷ Bogdan, *Western Esotericism*, 85–93.

¹⁰⁸ Rousse-Lacordaire, *Jésus dans la tradition maçonnique*, 93–94.

¹⁰⁹ BML MS 5867, pièce 46 (letter from the count de Salm to Willermoz, February 10, 1784).

necessary instructions to achieve the pinnacle of perfection and happiness.”¹¹⁰ Scholars who have investigated monastic lodges in which a number of members attained the Rosy Cross rank likewise have suggested that Freemasonry’s poor relief and rituals imbued with Christian symbolism represented for clerics a “supplementary means to achieve Christian perfection.”¹¹¹

MASONIC RELIGIOUS CULTURE DURING THE REVOLUTION

Looking out with dismay and confusion upon a France in political tumult, conservative thinkers in the 1790s pointed a damning finger at Freemasonry as one of the “principal authors” of the Revolution. Adversaries of the Masons established such a tight cause-and-effect sequence between them and revolutionary politics—at the levels of both agency and political credo—that one writer declared a few years after the storming of the Bastille and the revolt in the Estates General that “it is difficult to explain how much the National Assembly of France owes to Freemasonry.”¹¹² Fortunately, the simplistic notion of Masonry purposefully staging the Revolution had lost much of its intellectual currency by the twentieth century among historians. More recently, masonic scholars have followed the advice of the likes of Vincenzo Ferrone and Daniel Roche who have urged inverting the classical relationship between the Enlightenment and the Revolution. Rather than teleologically seeking out the origins of revolutionary behavior or attitudes within eighteenth-century philosophy and modes of sociability like Freemasonry, historians must instead view the masonic setting as a fruitful laboratory where an institution of the Old Regime encountered and adapted to a new political and cultural landscape in the final decade of the eighteenth century. This perspective therefore takes to heart Ferrone’s plea that historians must exercise the necessary “awareness of the autonomy of the historical world of the Enlightenment” and avoid sacrificing the study of the Enlightenment and its institutions to what Roche has called “the idol of teleology.”¹¹³ Records for lodges in Bordeaux, Brest, Marseille, and Paris as well as private correspondence between brethren from Lyon have survived in disparate archives, and this material allows us to assess the degree to which the religious attitudes and behaviors within Freemasonry evolved or remained consistent during the 1790s. Such an investigation is not only important for the history of Freemasonry but can also shed further light on the fate of the Catholic Enlightenment in the revolutionary era.

¹¹⁰ Chevallier, “La loge de la Vertu,” 57, 70.

¹¹¹ Michaux, “L’abbaye de Saint-Avoid,” 202.

¹¹² Lefranc, *Le voile levé pour les curieux*, 34.

¹¹³ Vincenzo Ferrone, *The Enlightenment: The History of an Idea*, trans. Elisabetta Tarantino (Princeton, NJ, 2010), 85; Roche, *France in the Enlightenment*, 6.

Religious topics emerged almost immediately in personal letters. As early as the summer of 1789, one subject that attracted a lot of attention from brethren was the reactionary behavior of a vocal minority of clergy in the National Assembly who were particularly disgruntled after an August 13 decree abolished the tithes due to clergy on Church-owned lands. This perceived resistance to change had begun to engender some anticlerical sentiment among Masons, including Jean-Baptiste Willermoz, who had highlighted the importance of the Catholic Church as a unifying center for European Christianity in letters to Lutheran brethren during the 1780s.¹¹⁴ And yet, in an early September 1789 letter composed to the bookseller P  riss   Du Luc, his friend and fellow Mason who was serving as a Lyonnais deputy in the National Assembly, he expresses for the first time in his correspondence an explicit critique of those clergy within the Assembly whom he decried as a “hydra of 100 heads that becomes much more dangerous when one attacks it rather than kill it on the spot. If the Assembly does not dare with all of its power to cut off 99 of its heads, the nation will only be more oppressed in the future.”¹¹⁵ Later that month, he expanded on his position, reflecting a view that would be widely expressed the following year by those clergy who accepted the Civil Constitution. Willermoz confided to Du Luc that while clergy have “the right to be distinguished” in the spiritual realm, “one cannot find anything in the Gospels that allows such distinctions in the political order.”¹¹⁶ Once the public taking of the oath of loyalty to the Civil Constitution of the Clergy had begun by late 1790, Willermoz and other Lyonnais brethren spoke highly of clergy who were vocal supporters of the oath. Singled out for special praise was Antoine Lamourette, who was elected Constitutional Bishop of Lyon in February 1791 and whose writings the previous decade had championed the utilitarian themes of the Catholic Enlightenment by showing how the Gospel instructed men in how to be morally upright citizens.¹¹⁷

With the declaration of the first Republic in the fall of 1792, some important changes in how lodges integrated Christian symbolism can be found. From this moment onward, religious affiliation was no longer the sole variable aside from one’s profession that had to be formally declared before entering into a lodge; now prospective Masons had to declare their *civisme*, *amour de la patrie*, and status as a *citoyen* or *r  publicain fran  ais* before initiation. By the fall of 1793, lodges located in cities like Lyon, Toulouse, Bordeaux, and Marseille that had risen up in early June against local Jacobins to protest the proscription of their

¹¹⁴ BML MS 5868, pi  ce 70 (Willermoz to Bernard de Turkheim, December 10, 1785).

¹¹⁵ BML MS 5872, pi  ce 13 (Willermoz to P  riss   du Luc, September 7, 1789).

¹¹⁶ BML MS 5872, pi  ce 14 (Willermoz to P  riss   du Luc, September 11, 1789).

¹¹⁷ Willermoz and his brethren discuss Lamourette at length in a series of letters written in March 1791. See BML MS 5874. On Lamourette’s religious views, see Sorkin, *The Religious Enlightenment*, 280.

deputies from the National Convention were facing immense pressure from representatives-on-mission—deputies from the Convention tasked with army recruitment and the purging of local government—who viewed Freemasonry as a relic of the past that had more in common with exclusive networks of patron-client relations than it had with a new political order that was nominally anchored in inclusivity and transparency. In Marseille, the *Parfaite Sincérité* (Perfect Sincerity) lodge was essentially taken over by Antoine Christophe Saliceti, the representative-on-mission who had first accompanied republican troops entering the city in late August 1793. In early October, he along with a half dozen of his subordinates were all admitted into the lodge; this was truly an atypical event since lodges generally preferred to initiate one man at a time and almost never initiated more than two or three in one meeting. Almost immediately following this influx of Saliceti's coterie, the lodge began its transformation into a veritable political club: imitating Jacobin Clubs in Paris and the provinces, new initiates soon put up busts of political martyrs Jean-Paul Marat and Louis-Michel le Pelletier as well as those of Roman republican Brutus and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau. What is particularly relevant for our present discussion is that any reference to a candidate's religious affiliation also disappeared from this point forward until the lodge's ultimate dissolution in late January 1794.¹¹⁸

Although brethren were doubtless aware that hostility to organized religion had become a major feature of the Republic by Year II, most lodges continued to use the Gospels during initiation and to celebrate the banquets of St. John in December and June. It was only over the course of Year II that some brethren finally moved to expunge Christian references from the St. John's Day banquet; Bordelais Masons eventually dubbed it the "general festival of Masons."¹¹⁹ During this time, some lodges even canceled or pushed aside St. John's Day festivities in favor of celebrating recently invented civic festivals. The *Centre des Amis* (Center of Friends) lodge in Paris, for example, decided that because the Festival of the Supreme Being had been planned for early June 1794, they would postpone their banquet until later that summer.¹²⁰ Late 1793 and early 1794 also saw the elimination in some lodges of the Gospels for the use of candidates taking their oath of fidelity to Freemasonry in favor of a facsimile of the Declaration of Rights of Man and Citizen, which was, in the words of one lodge secretary, "the sole Gospel of Reason and Philosophy."¹²¹ By the summer of 1794, then, masonic space in many venues had become almost completely secularized in a manner similar to those towns whose municipal authorities had expunged references to saints in favor of civic or revolutionary terms.

¹¹⁸ BN FM3 388, fols. 69–83v.

¹¹⁹ GODF MS AR 113.2.102, fol. 185 (June 28, 1794).

¹²⁰ BN FM3 31, fol. 111 (May 9, 1794).

¹²¹ BN FM3 31, fol. 101.

But there is much evidence to suggest that these changes were either imposed on Freemasons from outside (as in the case of the Parfaite Sincérité lodge in Marseille) or were careful semantic and structural modifications brethren undertook in order to continue operating from the fall of 1793 onward. In Bordeaux, for example, in a practice similar to the renaming of streets and public spaces in the city, lodges adopted names perceived to be more in line with the values of the Jacobin-controlled municipal government: Anglaise became Égalité, Française d'Acquitaine now called itself Française d'Unité, and Fidèle Anglaise changed its name to Liberté. They also placed the tricolor on all official correspondence and decorations, and it was hoped that these measures would shield lodges from any unwanted attention from the newly formed Jacobin municipal council, which had already begun to arrest, condemn, and execute perceived dissidents. Bordelais brethren were a part of a much wider development, as Masons devised similar strategies in many locations across the nation, including Brest, Saint-Étienne, and Toulouse.¹²²

Once the fall of Robespierre and the departure of the Convention's representatives from provincial cities had taken place, there was no longer any reason for lodges to maintain this facade. Although most lodges had closed down by June 1794, they restarted in earnest in 1795 and 1796. The Gospels returned, Saint-John's Day banquets were once again celebrated, and lodges reverted to their older names. Anglaise in Bordeaux, for example, proceeded to abandon the name Égalité and explicitly repudiated its conduct in late 1793: "We will conduct ourselves as did our fathers who preceded us and who honored Freemasonry, for in the lodge, the brother is neither a civic man nor a political man, he is a Mason. Masonry has its old ways, its old practices, its old rites and we cannot change anything."¹²³

Besides these Thermidorian expressions of regret, the sustained cooperation between lodges and local clergy in the distribution of poor relief further points to the perseverance of Old Regime religious patterns within revolutionary Freemasonry. In Ludovician France, lodges embraced the Catholic Enlightenment principle of the usefulness of Christianity and consequently worked with parish priests in coordinating poor aid. In late November 1781, both the Contrat Social (Social Contract) and Amis Réunis (Reunited Friends) lodges in Paris raised over a thousand livres from their memberships and donated this money to their local parishes (Saint-Eustache and Montmartre, respectively) for poor relief.¹²⁴

¹²² Daniel Ligou, *Franc-Maçonnerie et Révolution française* (Paris, 1989), 157–58; Michel Taillefer, *La Franc-maçonnerie toulousaine sous l'Ancien régime et la Révolution: 1741–1799* (Paris, 1984), 312.

¹²³ GODF MS AR 113.2.103, fols. 5v–6 (December 5, 1795).

¹²⁴ BN FM2 44 (Amis Réunis), fol. 53. Other typical instances of clergy directly requesting or receiving masonic funds can be found within the Modération (Moderation) lodge in Marseille (BN FM3 387).

Clergy received such funds from lodges or appealed directly to brethren both on a routine basis and to commemorate a special event. In January 1779, for example, on occasion of the birth of the royal couple's first child, the Sincérité (Sincerity) lodge in Besançon purchased 1,200 livres worth of wheat that was then donated to a local curé for distribution among the town's needy.¹²⁵

Evidence suggests that during this turbulent time Masons relied on clergy more heavily in order to ensure that individuals receiving financial assistance were truly indigent. Consider, for example, the detailed account ledger of the Amitié lodge of Bordeaux that contains nearly 900 line items of expenses from July 1783 down to February 1794, when heavy police surveillance during the Terror finally brought Freemasonry to a temporary halt in the city.¹²⁶ Amitié was one of the older and more prestigious lodges in the city, having been founded in 1746 in the wealthy merchant district of Chartons. By the 1780s, its membership consisted mostly of successful merchants, and it also welcomed high government officials—such as the Viscount of Noé who served as mayor of Bordeaux until 1790—as well as military nobles who were in the Boulonnais and Orléanais regiments and several clergy, including two canons, a priest, and two monastics (a Carmelite and a Benedictine).¹²⁷

Unlike the records of most lodges, whose treasurers intermittently scribbled financial notes within the same volume as the meeting minutes, the Amitié document offers an unbroken narrative of the financial history of the lodge for over a decade. For the ten complete years (1784 to 1793) contained in the documentation, Amitié spent on average 10,585 livres per year on expenses ranging from provisioning the lodge with food and drink to purchasing stationary. A sizable line item during this period was charitable giving: brethren devoted almost a third of their expenses (31 percent) to donations during the 1780s. They provided funds to a myriad of Bordelais residents, including indigent Freemasons and unfortunate victims of fire or illness, as well as widows and orphans. Presumably the lodge denied relief to some individuals who knocked on its doors, but these unsuccessful cases are regrettably unaccounted for since every individual listed in the accounting ledger received some sum.

During the Revolution, charity dropped significantly, reaching an annual average of just over 10 percent of expenses from 1790 onward. The reason for this reduction in giving was that the lodge's membership and attendance, like all other lodges in the city, were in sharp decline. Men devoted increasing amounts

¹²⁵ Cited in Georges Luquet, *La Franc-maçonnerie et l'état en France au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1963), 123–24.

¹²⁶ All expense figures are derived from Amitié's accounting ledger, which is located at GODF MS AR 113.2.93. On the plight of Freemasonry in Bordeaux at the height of the Terror, see Loiselle, "Living the Enlightenment in an Age of Revolution," 76–78.

¹²⁷ Nozumu Tase, "Construire l'espace maçonnique: Les loges bordelaises des Lumières au Premier Empire" (PhD diss., Université Côte d'Azur, 2019), 50–51.

of their leisure time to the many political clubs and sectional assemblies that were emerging, and some Masons were among the 2,000 troops from the city who had been dispatched to Bayonne to hold the Spanish at bay in 1793.¹²⁸ Amitié therefore collected fewer dues, which meant that a much larger proportion of the overall budget was devoted to the simple upkeep of the lodge, whether it was paying rent or replacing broken cutlery and lost silverware. In this environment of limited funds, we find that lodge officers expected local individuals in need who were personally unknown to them (essentially meaning non-Masons) to present a certificate of Catholic faith from a Bordelais parish priest. Beggars in the Old Regime routinely carried such documents to show that they were truly needy and of sound morals, and some of them in Bordeaux had presented these certificates to Amitié's officers when they had sought out funds from the lodge back in the 1780s.¹²⁹ But brethren relied even more heavily on this certification once the Revolution began. Whereas less than 30 percent of non-Masons who presented themselves to the lodge during the 1780s possessed such a certificate, over 90 percent had one during the 1790–93 period. Why were the poor who sought funds from Amitié much more likely to possess a certificate in the 1790s than beforehand? Of course, it is possible that those who knocked on the doors of Amitié in the 1780s did indeed have these certificates, but that the lodge secretary did not feel it necessary to record them systematically because funds were not as limited as they would be later on in the Revolution. This is, however, unlikely to have occurred often because when individuals unknown to the lodge did present themselves without a clerical certificate, the secretary wrote *sans certificat* in the ledger.¹³⁰ A more plausible explanation for the increased frequency of this documentation is that the lodge depended more heavily on local clergy to screen potential indigents because parish priests were already part of an established group dedicated to poor relief that was still quite vibrant during the prerevolutionary decades in Bordeaux.¹³¹

This older trust network withstood even the Civil Oath of the Clergy, one of the most contentious events in the religious politics of the Revolution. Starting on the last Sunday of January 1791, curés in Bordeaux were required to swear fidelity publicly to “the nation, the law, the king, and the Constitution” while eager parishioners along with municipal and departmental administrators looked on. Because the archbishop had already refused the oath and circulated a pamphlet explaining his actions, and because clergy in France's largest cities tended

¹²⁸ Alan Forrest, *Society and Politics in Revolutionary Bordeaux* (Oxford, 1975), 114.

¹²⁹ John McManners, *Church and Society in Eighteenth-Century France*, vol. 1, *The Clerical Establishment and Its Social Ramifications* (Oxford, 1998), 371.

¹³⁰ See, for example, the April 1786 entry for a certain “Dame Barbier.”

¹³¹ Philippe Loupès, “L’assistance paroissiale aux pauvres malades dans le diocèse de Bordeaux au XVIIIe siècle,” *Annales du Midi* 84 (1972): 37–61.

to view their group as distinct from wider society, only two out of the eligible fifteen curés in Bordeaux took the oath. By early 1791, these refractory priests had been replaced with new clergy who took the oath and began officiating on the April 10.¹³² What is striking is that Amitié continued to accept certificates from refractory parish priests. Possibly because of the tumult surrounding the oath, brethren received no certificates from curés in 1791. But in 1792, they welcomed eight indigents who possessed a certificate signed by a specific pre-1791 parish priest who had not taken the oath. This does not necessarily mean that the Freemasons in Bordeaux refused to work with newly installed constitutional priests or that they opposed the Civil Oath on religious grounds, since some constitutional priests were in fact initiated into lodges in 1792.¹³³ Amitié's willingness to continue to work with refractory priests instead demonstrates the desire of the lodge to move beyond the contentious religious politics of the Revolution in the effort to help the city's poor during this turbulent time. Brethren heavily privileged clergy over newly created organizations for distributing relief funds: they donated only twice in the late 1780s to the secular Société Philanthropique de Bordeaux, and provided funds directly to the city government only one time in 1790 following a personal appeal from Isaac Tarteiron, a municipal administrator.

* * *

Exploring what books Masons read, what rituals they performed, and how they weathered the turbulence of the Revolution demonstrates how certain core tenets historians have associated with the Catholic Enlightenment—notably Christocentrism, ecumenism, and utilitarianism—were amplified within and shaped the social life of one of the largest voluntary organizations in eighteenth-century France. The Catholic Enlightenment thus was much more than a restricted group of lay writers or clerical apologists who advocated a reform of Catholic piety: it was also a cultural movement where ordinary men and women created institutions like Freemasonry where they could live their faith in ways that were useful, practical, and individualized. Highlighting this religious dimension of the masonic experience in fact helps us more clearly understand why people chose to enter Freemasonry in the first place, and why some considered the fraternity an organic

¹³² The unsuccessful attempts to extract the oath from parish priests are chronicled in Ariste Ducaunnès-Duval, *Inventaire-sommaire des Archives municipales: Période révolutionnaire* (Bordeaux, 1896), 1:170–212. Statistics for Bordeaux can be found in Roger Guiraud, “L’attitude du clergé girondin devant le serment constitutionnel,” *Revue historique de Bordeaux et du département de la Gironde* 14 (1965): 127. On the general opposition to the oath among clerics in France’s largest towns, see Timothy Tackett, *Religion, Revolution, and Regional Culture in Eighteenth-Century France: The Ecclesiastical Oath of 1791* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), 50–51, 121.

¹³³ Tase, “Construire l’espace maçonnique,” 316n83.

extension of their spiritual lives. “From my point of view,” explained the master of the Parisian St. Julien de la Tranquillité lodge in a letter to his fellow in late December 1765, “I have always considered the society of Masons to be a religious life and always speak of it in this way.”¹³⁴ By becoming a Mason, one participated in what John McManners once called Christianity’s dynamic “process of rediscovery and renewal” in the eighteenth century that embraced a religious middle ground between orthodoxy and the heterodoxy of the *philosophes* where the Enlightenment fruitfully intersected with scripture, tradition, and certain institutional components of the Church. It was undoubtedly this hybridity and blending of tradition with modernity that made the fraternity so attractive to those who had migrated from older modes of sociability like confraternities.¹³⁵

What emerges from the evidence we have examined in the previous pages is a picture in sharp contrast to those accounts to which some historians still stubbornly cling in which Freemasonry is presented as a secular alternative to Christian religious communities where Masons avidly consumed Radical Enlightenment literature and performed non-Christian rituals.¹³⁶ In her most recent statement on Enlightenment Freemasonry, Margaret Jacob has taken a more nuanced view, arguing that lodges in Ludovician France prohibited non-Christians from membership and used Christian symbolism in their meetings. And yet, she also demotes these enduring religious elements as the mere “residue of the Christian heritage” and writes that Freemasonry operated as an “an outlet for progressive thought and an alternative to organized religion” that could prove especially attractive to those “disaffected from traditional religion.”¹³⁷ Although this description of Freemasons’ uneasy relationship with traditional religion might be valid in contexts outside of France, it would be difficult to characterize the lodges and individuals we have examined in this article as disillusioned from traditional Catholicism. In speeches and apologies from the 1720s onward, brethren railed against heterodoxy, defended the core tenets of Christianity, and acted out key moments of scripture—such as the Resurrection in the Rosy Cross—in their rituals. If brethren had indeed felt alienated from the Church, it is also highly unlikely that in

¹³⁴ GODF MS AR 113.1.94, fol. 20 (letter of December 29, 1765).

¹³⁵ John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (Oxford, 1985), 443. See also Dan Edelstein, *The Enlightenment: A Genealogy* (Chicago, 2010), 10.

¹³⁶ Bryan Banks, “Real and Imaginary Friends in Revolutionary France: Quakers, Political Culture, and the Atlantic World,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 50 (2017): 373–74; Burson, “The Catholic Enlightenment in France,” 94–95; Edward Muir, *Ritual in Early Modern Europe*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, 2005), 296; William Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge, 2001), 151; Ann Thomson, “Informal Networks,” in *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-century Philosophy*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge, 2006), 121–36.

¹³⁷ Margaret Jacob, *The Secular Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ, 2019), 4, 23, 121–23.

1755 the Grand Lodge of France would have required all French lodge members to attend masses together on Sundays and religious holidays, a practice that continued at least until the end of the century. For brethren, the Catholic mass endured as a means to celebrate collectively a joyful event such as the Dauphin's healthy birth in 1781, to mark symbolically meaningful feast days like the St. John's Day festival in June, or to mourn brethren who had perished from natural causes or in military service defending revolutionary France.¹³⁸ If Freemasonry were ambivalent about or uncomfortable with the Church, it is also probable that the approximately 700 members of the First Estate in lodges during the second half of the eighteenth century (a number revealing that the percentage of Freemasons who were clerics represented nearly seven times their proportion in the general population) would not have been as attracted to or welcomed into the fraternity in the first place.¹³⁹

By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, masonic identity clearly had developed around republicanism, and by the Third Republic around *laïcité*.¹⁴⁰ How did an ecumenically Christian nonpolitical organization devoted to charitable giving and conviviality in the eighteenth century—which, incidentally, is what Freemasonry still mostly resembles in the Anglo-American context today—evolve into a movement associated with progressive politics? Although answering such a question lies well beyond the province of this article, this mutation likely has much to do with the consistent tide of anti-masonic writers who, from the early 1790s onward, flooded the public realm with a distorted caricature of Freemasonry as inherently hostile to Roman Catholicism and conservative politics. At the precise moment when the Catholic Church was distancing itself from

¹³⁸ On the Grand Lodge's statute, see Alain Le Bihan, *Francs-maçons et ateliers parisiens de la Grande Loge de France au XVIII^e siècle (1760–1795)* (Paris, 1973), 395. For representative samples of mass attendance from the 1770s onward, see BN FM2 44, fol. 7v (Amis Réunis in Paris celebrating Saint John's Day, 1773); Georges Bourgin, "La loge de Saint-Alphonse des Amis Parfaits de la Vertu à l'orient de Paris de 1780 à 1790," *La Révolution française* 60 (1911): 339 (the Grand Orient in Paris commissioning a *Te Deum* mass in honor of the birth of the Dauphin, 1781); GODF MS AR 113.2.101, fol. 159 (Anglaise in Bordeaux commissioning a requiem mass for departed brethren, 1788); ADF MS 40 J 5, fol. 25v (Heureuse Rencontre in Brest requesting a mass for the death of two of its members who had volunteered in the revolutionary armies, 1792).

¹³⁹ Clergy represented approximately 0.6 percent of the population by the 1780s in France: Peter McPhee, *The French Revolution, 1789–1799* (Oxford, 2002), 13. For a regional breakdown of the First Estate's masonic affiliation, see the lodge tables in Roche, *Le siècle des Lumières en province*, 2:419. Georges Luquet has suggested (without providing any evidence) that the number of clergy in Freemasonry was possibly as high as 2,000; see "La Franc-maçonnerie et l'Église en France au XVIII^e siècle," *Bulletin des Ateliers Supérieurs* 43 (1955): 33–67.

¹⁴⁰ Philip Nord, *The Republican Moment: Struggles for Democracy in Nineteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA, 1995), chap. 1.

the Enlightenment—which it unfairly blamed for the religious upheavals of the Revolution—apologists and conservative newspapers were already placing heavy emphasis on lodges as conveyors of a revolutionary agenda.¹⁴¹ With the selling off of Church lands underway and the Constituent Assembly moving toward finalizing the Civil Oath of the Clergy, the bishop of Châlons-sur-Marne, Anne-Antoine-Jules de Clermont-Tonnerre, blamed Freemasonry for these developments, lashing out in the pages of his *Gazette de Paris* that the fraternity was “destructive . . . of all Orders, of all political conventions, [and] of all social organization.”¹⁴² The following years saw this message metastasize from clerical voices like de Clermont-Tonnerre’s to lay writers. Chief editor of the reactionary *Messenger du Soir*, Isidore Langlois, warned in December 1796 that the “Freemasons are reproducing and multiplying in a manner that worries all good citizens who, exhausted by revolution, fear all of its implements.” The following week, prominent Mason Louis-Florimond Fustier submitted a letter to the editor where he fought back against Langlois’s misrepresentation by stressing that Old Regime lodges had always been composed chiefly of the nobility and middling sort who displayed “the most profound respect” for laws and religious worship.¹⁴³ And yet older Masons like Fustier could do little to stem the advance of the message that Freemasonry was a platform for politics on the left, especially after the publication of Abbé Augustin Barruel’s highly influential *Mémoires pour servir à l’histoire du Jacobinisme* (1797–98).¹⁴⁴ This was the image men increasingly held as they entered into or created lodges from the turn of the nineteenth century onward, and it was these new men of Masonry who sought to transform the institution so that it would be more closely aligned with the fiction first put forth by the enemies of Freemasonry.¹⁴⁵ The French Revolution thus was a major, though paradoxical, turning point in the history of the fraternity when its opponents unintentionally provided the wider public with a powerful new and modern way of looking at and living with this Old Regime institution, whose legacy today owes much more to its detractors than to its once loyal followers.

¹⁴¹ Lehner, *The Catholic Enlightenment*, 213–15.

¹⁴² *Gazette de Paris* (October 31, 1790), 3.

¹⁴³ The Langlois-Fustier exchange is reprinted in “La Franc-Maçonnerie à Paris en L’An V,” *La Révolution française* 37 (1899): 278–79.

¹⁴⁴ Jeremy Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2011), 241–42.

¹⁴⁵ The secularization of the Rosy-Cross degree is a case in point. During the first half of the nineteenth century, brethren reframed the ritual as a vehicle of a purely secular morality rather than as a Christocentric performance. Lacordaire, *Jésus dans la tradition maçonnique*, 200–201.