

“Our Terrestrial Journey is Coming to an End”: The Last Voyage of the Solar Temple

Jean-François Mayer

(Translated by Elijah Siegler)

We, Loyal Servants of the Rosy Cross, declare that, as we left one day, we will return stronger than ever . . . for the Rosy Cross is immortal . . . Like Her, we are of all time and no time.¹

The mysterious circumstances surrounding the dramatic “transit” of fifty-three members of the Order of the Solar Temple (OTS, *Ordre du Temple Solaire*) in Switzerland and in Québec in October 1994 have spawned an unprecedented wave of public speculation and conspiracy mongering. The subsequent death of sixteen people in France in December 1995 and of five more in Québec in March 1997 have only added to these conspiratorial speculations. Ironically, Joseph Di Mambro, Luc Jouret, and those who, over the course of months, methodically prepared their own deaths and the deaths of dozens of others were quite concerned about the impact their departure would have on the public mind and spent many hours creating a kind of legend that would survive their earthly exit. Why else would they have felt the need to send manifestos justifying *post mortem* their decision not only to order members but also to television stations, newspapers, and some other correspondents (including the author of this article)? The Swiss investigators found a tape, dating probably from the spring of 1994, in which one can hear the core group discuss the “departure.” There is a telling exchange between Joseph Di Mambro and Luc Jouret:

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

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

JDM: In my opinion, we should have gone six months before them . . . what we'll do will be even more spectacular . . .²

“More spectacular”: such are the words used by Joseph Di Mambro himself. A movement such as the Solar Temple cannot escape its media-saturated era. It worries about its public image until the very hour of the “crowning of the work,” to use its own vocabulary. Many fringe movements tend to cultivate a very high estimation of their own importance, and the OTS was no exception. The core members of the group understood themselves as an elect people who had incarnated periodically on Earth since ancient times in order to fulfill a cosmic mission. They had gathered together for that purpose and were ready to sacrifice their lives for its sake. Especially toward the end, some internal texts disclose these grandiose perspectives:

Do you understand what we represent? We are the promise that the R[osy] C[ross] made to the Immutable. We are the Star Seeds that guarantee the perennial existence of the universe, we are the hand of God that shapes creation. We are the Torch that Christ must bring to the Father to feed the Primordial Fire and to reanimate the forces of Life, which, without our contribution, would slowly but surely go out. We hold the key to the universe and must secure its Eternity.³

In reality, like so many other movements that see themselves on the cutting edge of cosmic progress and who assign to minor events in their own history a global significance, the Solar Temple was in fact a tiny (and actually declining) group whose claim to cosmic importance would have been viewed as dubious by most commentators. But through a sensational act of self-immolation that compelled the attention of both popular and academic observers, the leaders of the Solar Temple came close to creating a durable legend for their esoteric order.

Unfortunately for the order's leaders, documents exist which, when analyzed carefully, begin to deconstruct this legend. If everything had worked as Di Mambro planned, no trace would have remained. Nothing, not even the bodies themselves, would have been recovered: “We will not let our bodies dissolve according to nature's slow alchemy, because we don't want to run the risk that they become soiled by frantic lunatics.”⁴ The Solar Temple's thorough preparation for their mysterious exit, however, could not take into account certain technical problems: some of the devices intended to start the fire did not function properly, which made it possible for the investigators to seize a large number of written documents (in part found on

computers that survived the fires relatively unscathed) as well as video and audio cassettes belonging to the group's archives. It is upon these sources that this article is in large part based.⁵

JOSEPH DI MAMBRO, THE GOLDEN WAY FOUNDATION, AND THE NEO-TEMPLAR MOVEMENT

Joseph Di Mambro was born in Pont-Saint-Esprit, in the French department of Gard, 19 August 1924. At the age of sixteen, he began an apprenticeship as a watchmaker and jeweler and very soon became fascinated with esotericism. In January 1956, he joined the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC), to which he would belong until at least 1968. In the 1960s, he apparently established links with several persons who would later play a role in OTS history, including Jacques Breyer, the initiator of a "Templar resurgence" in France in 1952 to which several groups, including Di Mambro's OTS, trace part of their roots.

Several major points of doctrine, as well as an embryonic circle of disciples, began crystallizing during the 1960s. After visiting Israel and dealing with legal problems in Nîmes in 1971 related to swindling and writing bad checks, Di Mambro set himself up in Annemasse, near the Swiss border. In 1973, he became president of the Center for the Preparation of the New Age, which was presented as a "cultural center for relaxation" and a yoga school. The center became a full-time job by 1976. That same year, eight people (seven of whom resided at a common address) formed a building society and purchased a house named "The Pyramid" at Collonges-sous-Salève, close to Geneva. Of these eight people, four would lose their lives in October 1994. The building society in fact sheltered an esoteric activity: the consecration of the Temple of the Great White Universal Lodge, Pyramid Sub-Lodge, was celebrated on 24 June 1976. Internal documents show that, of the fifty-three believers who died in October 1994, at least twelve already belonged to the group by the end of 1977.

The next step commenced on 12 July 1978 with the creation of the Golden Way Foundation in Geneva. This foundation would remain at the very heart of activities undertaken by Di Mambro's various groups over the ensuing years. Thanks to substantial financial sacrifices made by several members, the foundation bought an attractive property in a suburb of Geneva that was the site of meetings open to nonmembers. The Golden Way Foundation was above all a front for a nucleus of people called simply the "Fraternity,"⁶ who took part in esoteric rites in a communitarian setting. This communitarian ideal played a role in attracting people to the group and also led later to disappointments

when the gap between the ideal and the reality of everyday life became untenable for certain members. People belonging to the “Fraternity” held all assets in common; along with them lived people belonging to what was called the “Community,” who kept their income, paid a rent, and bought tickets for food and beverages. In the context of the 1970s, it was only one attempt among many others at developing an ideal communal life. Indeed, one member who joined at that time had lived in the New Age community of Findhorn, Scotland, and was hoping to find something similar in the Golden Way.

Excerpts from an account given at a 1994 OTS meeting provide us with retrospective (and no doubt idealized) glimpses into the experiences of the pioneer members of the brotherhood:

Meeting at first in a house which they called “the Pyramid,” where every evening was devoted to rituals and meditation, they later moved near Geneva, to a large property which was discovered to be an ancient Templar command post. . . . There, living in a perfect fraternity where all was equally shared—salaries were put into a common fund and everyone received in return an equal share—they devoted all their free time to the cause of spirituality. Daily ceremonies quickly became operational at the highest degree, even more so because hermeticists, alchemists, and spiritually elevated people joined in. The Masters of the beyond regularly manifested themselves, with a presence visible, audible, and olfactory.

The Golden Way Foundation had impressive headquarters, but in order to spread its ideas on a larger scale the group needed a communicator. Enter a Belgian homeopathic physician, Luc Jouret (born 18 October 1947), who was likely introduced to Di Mambro by one of the victims of October 1994. On 30 May 1982, Jouret and his then wife⁷ were “accepted in the Golden Way” and took the oath of “Knights of the Rosy Cross.” Di Mambro confided to some members at the time that Jouret had charisma and, being a physician, would be taken seriously; therefore, he should be pushed into the limelight, while Di Mambro would remain discretely backstage.

From that moment on, Luc Jouret became the propagandist for the group. Beginning in 1983, he gave lectures in Switzerland, France, and Canada. Cultural clubs were created and, from 1984 to 1990, the organization operated as a tripartite structure involving (1) public lectures and seminars given by Jouret and a few others under the label of Amenta; (2) an exoteric structure, the Archedia Clubs, for those wishing to go further; and finally, for a limited number of candidates, (3) an initiatory order (organized as the esoteric counterpart of the clubs) called the “International Order of Chivalry, Solar Tradition.”⁸ Obviously, the group hoped to attract a wider audience, and it thus prepared structures meant for a much larger movement than it ever became. The success of Luc Jouret, a gifted speaker who easily attracted

hundreds to his lectures, could only add fuel to the fire of such hopes. The fact that Jouret was able to draw such large audiences to his lectures is proof that the topics he was dealing with were of interest to at least a part of the cultic milieu of the time.⁹ However, because of the seeker's mentality typical of the cultic milieu, most of those who came to Jouret's lectures did not want to commit themselves on a firm basis and, despite the lecturer's success, significant growth for the OTS in terms of committed membership never materialized.

The group's Templar activities¹⁰ had their roots in a 1952 "resurgence" in which the French esoteric author Jacques Breyer (1922-1996) played a central role. While reluctant to take upon himself any administrative responsibility in those Templar circles claiming some link with the "resurgence," Breyer enjoyed the role of an elder advisor to whom those groups turned at crucial times in order to ask his opinion. Di Mambro did so several times.

Although Di Mambro's OTS considered the 1952 resurgence as a "first impulse," the real resurgence began for them on 21 March 1981. On that day, "knights" met at the Golden Way Foundation headquarters "to renew their oath of allegiance to the Order of the Temple and to the XXIIIrd Occult Grand Master to come."¹¹ One of the goals of the meeting was to achieve "Templar unity," and for this purpose the heads of two Neo-Templar Orders had been invited—Jean-Louis Marsan, Grand Master of the OSTS (*Ordre Souverain du Temple Solaire*, i.e., Sovereign Order of the Solar Temple) and Julien Origas, Grand Master of the ORT (*Ordre Rénové du Temple*, i.e., Renewed Order of the Temple). Like Di Mambro, both Origas and Marsan had been connected with the resurgence initiated by Breyer. "Templar unity" was not achieved, but such meetings show that members of these neo-Templar groups were partly interacting in the same milieu, with each group maintaining its specific features. For instance, the ORT was originally sponsored by Raymond Bernard (born in 1923), head of AMORC for French-speaking countries, who functioned for a time as the secret Grand Master of the ORT.¹²

After the death of Julien Origas (1920-1983), Luc Jouret briefly took control of the ORT as Grand Master, but immediately found himself confronted with opposition from Origas' wife and daughter. At the same time, some Canadians linked to the ORT expressed a strong interest in Jouret's message. During this period of crisis (March 1984), Luc Jouret, Joseph Di Mambro, and a Canadian member went to consult Jacques Breyer. Breyer told them that he thought it possible to develop something out of the small Canadian nucleus through restructuring the local groups and transferring the center of the OTS's activities to Canada. Breyer's advice was connected to apocalyptic considerations typical of his way of thinking: the "age of plagues," needed to open people up spiritually, was about to come because of the earth's growing

corruptions. The area around Toronto, Breyer claimed, would experience less upheaval during this time of troubles. In 1984, the Golden Way Foundation financed Joseph and Jocelyne Di Mambro's emigration to Canada; according to Breyer's advice, the Di Mambros first moved to Toronto. And Breyer himself, at a conclave of ORT officers during Easter 1984 in Geneva, informed the gathered people that the deposit was "to be transported to Canada" where a "Noah's ark" was to be built.¹³

From 1984 forward, the movement had two centers of activity—French-speaking Europe and Québec. The presence in Canada was also meant to reach the English-speaking world, mainly the United States:

The Executive Council of this New Order decided that, in line with the historic destiny of the Order of the Temple, the headquarters of the Order should be located somewhere on the North American continent. The reason for this decision is simple. North America has become the source of most of the new impulses which determine the way life evolves on this planet. It is therefore fitting that the modern Knight Templar of the old continent should play his part in the Age of Aquarius by adding his inspiration to that which his counterparts in the New World will bring to the planet.¹⁴

However, despite the beginning of a translation project designed to make certain rules and ritual texts available to English-speaking audiences, the order never had more than a handful of isolated members in the United States. In January 1989, at the height of its development and before internal turmoil took its toll on membership, OTS had 442 members, of which 90 were in Switzerland (monthly revenues: \$12,600), 187 in France (\$12,700), 53 in Martinique (\$3,400), 16 in the United States (\$1,125), 86 in Canada (\$7,000) and 10 in Spain.

FROM SURVIVALISM TO SELF-DESTRUCTION

In addition to these revenues, several well-endowed members donated large sums that amounted to hundreds of thousands (and up to millions) of U.S. dollars over the years. These donors hoped that their generosity would permit the financing of "life centers" on farms acquired in Canada and in Cheiry, Switzerland, in 1990. But the group's leaders diverted part of these donations into other areas, including their own travel expenses and living costs for community members with no external means of support. The constant need for funds led to financial problems, which were perhaps not entirely unrelated to the events of 1994.

Beginning in the 1990s, several members began distancing themselves from the order. Important donors among these members

wanted to recoup at least some of their money, and the group's revenues began to decline. Di Mambro had long pretended (since at least the late 1970s) to represent the "Mother Lodge" and to receive his orders from mysterious "Masters" in Zurich. The theme of "Unknown Superiors" is a commonplace of occult movements such as Rosicrucianism, Theosophy, and the I AM Activity. However, around 1990, Di Mambro's son Elie (1969-1994) began seriously to doubt the existence of the "Masters" of Zurich and discovered that fakery had been practiced by his father to produce the illusion of spiritual phenomena during the ceremonies celebrated in the order's sanctuaries. These phenomena—which included apparitions of spiritual entities—had been a major reason why several members had accepted Di Mambro as what he claimed to be. Even today, several leading former members remain convinced that, notwithstanding occasional fakery, some of the phenomena were authentic. Elie spoke openly about what he had discovered, which led to the departure of fifteen members. In 1993, there was a wave of resignations of French members who saw that their donations ended up as home improvements for their leader's residence. In February 1994, two members from Geneva sent an open letter to announce their decision to leave the movement, because "real fraternity [did] not exist in this structure, as extolled in the teachings." They were also worried about what happened to their contributions, observing the absence of the "life centers" which were supposed to be created.¹⁵ And these were not the only examples of defections.

Throughout the years, according to explanations provided by former members, Di Mambro had grown more authoritarian. He no longer helped with the daily chores, as he had in the original community.¹⁶ He wanted to gather bright people around him, but probably was also afraid of potential competitors. There was never any attempt at a takeover, but there were rivalries among Di Mambro's underlings, and some people felt that he was playing a game of divide and rule while expecting unconditional obedience from all members.¹⁷ When speaking to the police, a Canadian member who broke with the Solar Temple in 1993 summarized the feelings of many defectors: "I did not feel that the people were living what they preached. And I was tired of the infighting and never being able to find out what was going on, so I left."¹⁸

A report on the organization's situation in Europe written to Di Mambro on 10 December 1993 by a Swiss OTS officer reflects the growing dissent that was affecting the group at this time. The document also shows how a longtime follower who had developed serious doubts about Di Mambro's honesty nevertheless wanted to persevere in serving the ideal he had dedicated his life to for so many years. This loyalty had tragic consequences, as he was murdered in October 1994 as he was about to leave the farm where he lived with other members. The report states,

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

There are even more serious grumblings, and you know them. Here they are: everything that we saw and heard in certain places has been a trick. I have known this for some time. Tony [Dutoit]¹⁹ has been talking about this for years already. . . . I have always refused to pay attention to these rumors, but the evidence is growing, and questions are being asked. This calls into question many things I've seen, and messages. I would be really upset if I had to conclude that I had sincerely prostrated myself in front of an illusion!!! . . . There is enough stuff here to send less committed people packing. And all the resignations and departures of recent times just confirm it.

I don't want to analyze the reasons that could lead to such trickery, which was motivated by good intentions no doubt, but which transgressed the rules of common sense, when we see the mess we're in now. It's also been said that Zurich has never existed, that it's pure fantasy. . . .

As for myself, I believe in the cosmic law. I believe in the message received 2000 years ago by which I aim to live. I believe in the life ethic which my parents taught me and which I aim to apply. I believe in a conscience which I aim to find within myself. If I go down this path, I cannot be wrong. And no rumor, true or false, could deter me from what I have to do. I will continue to work in the Order and for the mission as long as you need me and as long as I can do it.²⁰

These controversies were not confined to the OTS sanctuaries. During the 1980s, the Solar Temple had more or less escaped anti-cult polemics. Jouret had two lines written about him in an entry on the ORT in a booklet put out by a French anti-cult group in 1984,²¹ but in the 1987 edition, both he and the ORT were left unmentioned. Oddly enough, in the end critical coverage did not come from Europe or Canada, but from the island of Martinique: on 10 September 1991, Lucien Zécler, president of the local branch of the Association for the Defense of Families and Individuals (ADFI), the leading anti-cult movement in France, sent a letter to several associations and centers in Québec, asking for information on the OTS. The request followed the decision of several citizens of Martinique to sell their worldly goods, leave their families, and move to Canada to escape coming disasters. At the end of 1992, a former member of the OTS went to Martinique to publicly denounce the Solar Temple, which provoked local media coverage.

Not long after, Luc Jouret ran afoul of law enforcement officials in Québec after he encouraged trusted members to buy guns illegally. The police were investigating anonymous threats from an unknown

terrorist group at the time and, when tipped off by an informer about the attempt by an inexperienced OTS member to get three guns with silencers, began to watch several members of the group. The members were arrested in March 1993. The Canadian media reported the story and published extracts from police wiretaps revealing the homeopath's unusual interest in fire arms. This gave the OTS more unwanted publicity and cooled the enthusiasm of several members, even though Jouret and two of his followers' were given the relatively mild sentence of one year of unsupervised probation and a fine of one thousand Canadian dollars (to be paid to the Red Cross) for buying prohibited arms.

These problems, internal and external, are crucial in understanding the OTS's gradual distortion and disintegration. Di Mambro had gathered around him a group that lent an appearance of reality to the fictions he created. And now this imaginary universe began to come under critical scrutiny. The head of the Solar Temple apparently decided to respond by taking himself and his followers away from the scene altogether.

Throughout the 1980s, the Solar Temple's doctrine had grown increasingly apocalyptic. Even in his public meetings, Luc Jouret frequently alluded to cataclysmic upheavals that threatened the planet with imminent destruction. The apocalyptic thinking of the Solar Temple had clear ecological connotations, and Jouret's lectures often described the earth as a holistic living entity who could no longer endure what humankind was inflicting on her.²² The concern of the leaders for the environmental situation seems to have been a sincere one: Di Mambro kept several video recordings of TV reports about ecological problems; in his home, investigators also found a testament showing that Di Mambro and his wife had considered listing ecological organizations in their will.

The Solar Temple's message was survivalist as well. We have already seen that this had caused the group to establish a base in Canada, which was considered to be a safer place. In 1986, the temple published in Toronto two volumes under the title, *Survivre à l'An 2000 (Survival beyond the Year 2000)*. The first volume was mostly doctrinal. The second dealt with the subject in a very practical way, establishing guidelines as to what provisions to store in order to survive a disaster that would destroy all essential technologies and what to do to survive atomic, bacteriological, or chemical warfare. In addition, it provided a detailed first aid manual. Nothing in these volumes would lead one to suspect suicidal tendencies; to the contrary, it seemed as if the adepts hoped to find themselves among those who survived the apocalypse unscathed.

How, then, can one explain the reversal that led a core of members to choose collective self-immolation? Besides survivalism, there were other latent themes, always on the same apocalyptic foundation, which

had the potential to encourage somewhat different pursuits in the group.²³ In a certain way, the Solar Temple's goals were classically gnostic in that they ultimately aimed at "the release of the 'inner man' from the bonds of the world and his return to his native realm of light."²⁴ The manifesto-testaments sent just prior to the events of October 1994 echo such feelings: "We, Servants of the Rosy Cross, forcefully reaffirm that we are not of this world and we know perfectly well the coordinates of our Origins and our Future."²⁵ "Always belonging to the Reign of the Spirit, incarnating the subtle link between Creature and Creator, we rejoin our Home."²⁶ The most devoted Solar Temple adepts would push this reasoning to its extreme logical consequences.

According to several testimonies gathered by the investigators, the theme of "transit" began to be evoked by Di Mambro in 1990 or 1991. It meant a voluntary departure or a consent to bring the germ of life to another planet. It was necessary to be ready to leave at any time in response to the call. Di Mambro said he did not yet know what the mode of transit would be: he presented the metaphor of a passage across a mirror and evoked the possibility of the coming of a flying saucer to take faithful members to another world. On this last point, it is worth noting that, at some of Luc Jouret's seminars which I attended in 1987, a comic strip called *Timeless Voyage* was on sale.²⁷ This strip tells the story of a group of UFO believers who, before the imminent "great mutation," are brought on board a "cosmic vessel" to "Vessel-Earth."²⁸ Solar Temple members were thus already familiar with this type of scenario well before 1990. An ex-member explained to the investigators that talks about transit never implied suicide, but rather the idea of being saved from disasters. Perhaps the theme of "transit," rather than marking a break with survivalism, should be interpreted as a reorientation towards a survival in other dimensions following the irreversible worsening of the situation on this planet.²⁹

If we believe their declarations to the police after the events of 1994, most of those members who had heard about the idea of "departure" or "transit" considered it as rather nebulous or interpreted it innocuously as a departure to other geographical locations (for example, leaving Geneva). When members wanted to know more, they sometimes received evasive answers:

Transit was the return to the Father, the return to the Unity, after having left Earth. . . . Two or three years before October 1994, I discussed with ——— what was meant by the concept. She told me that I shouldn't worry, that I wouldn't realize, that we would all leave together, as one. At the time, naively, I never thought that meant collective suicide.³⁰

Some members had known a little more precisely how things would happen. One remembers that Di Mambro "started talking about transit

to another world. He said that this would be accomplished by shift in consciousness and we wouldn't be aware of it."³¹ But this operation presupposed a certain degree of preparation:

[Di Mambro] explained to us that one day we'd all be called to a meeting at which a transit would be accomplished. It had to do with a mission, with a departure towards Jupiter. . . . He said to his listeners that they had to be on call twenty-four hours a day so as not to miss the departure and that once the order was given, we would have to move quickly.³²

This helps to explain the speed with which some of the victims suddenly abandoned everything to head to their mysterious demise. But if this confirms the emergence of the idea of "transit" well before October 1994, it does not explain the reasoning that led Di Mambro toward this plan of action. Outside of possible explanations linked to Di Mambro's mental state, it seems likely that criticism by ex-members, episodic public exposure in Martinique and Québec, and disappointed hopes for success led the Solar Temple's leadership to revise their view of the future. In addition, the wiretaps of Luc Jouret made by the police in Québec during the 1993 investigation reveal that the charismatic physician was in a depressed mood, constantly complaining about feeling tired and expressing eagerness to leave the world. Still, no one factor is sufficient in and of itself, especially since the collective self-immolation involved not just one individual but the order's entire core group. We can not rule out the possibility that some elements in the decision still remain unknown to us.

The first known version of a text explaining "departure" had been written by February 1993. This coincides with the opening of the investigation into the group by Québec police on 2 February 1993; since some sources suggest that Jouret may have gotten word of the investigation before the police interventions of 8 March 1993, we do not know with absolute certainty whether the text was written without knowledge of the investigation in progress.³³ At any rate, even if the problems in Martinique and in Québec confirmed Di Mambro and his close associates in their plan to leave a world perceived as unjust and doomed, these events did not initiate the idea of departure: the attempt at buying guns indicates that the idea was already under consideration prior to these investigations.

PASSING THE TORCH

The fact that texts trying to explain and justify the "transit" (including two of the four which were sent to the media in October 1994) were written by 1993 reveals that a group of people methodically prepared

for their deaths over a period of many months. To be ready for the passage to other spheres, the most dedicated members progressively severed all ties with the outside world. Messages received from other dimensions came to bolster them in their resolve to quit this planet. For example, a series of five messages collected under the title, "The Polestar," and supposedly delivered by "the Lady of Heaven," were received between 24 December 1993 and 17 January 1994. The first message calls on the recipients to root out their "terrestrial attraction" and talks about Jupiter as their "Next Home." The second message exhorts them to "put [their] last things in order to leave Earth free and clear." The third message declares, "We want you free to rejoin us, without feeling constrained, without feeling pressure, but of your own free will," and warns, "If you do not try your hardest to escape the attraction of this Earth, woe is you!" The fourth message repeats, "It is now time to leave humanity to its deadly destiny, you are done with it. Don't look in the world for whomever or whatever to save. Close the door on humans." As for the fifth message, it announces in a solemn tone that "no Light will stay on Earth" and can be summed up by the sentence, "Retire, let go of this Earth without remorse."³⁴

It no doubt took a great deal of persuasion to convince a nucleus of members to accept such a radical step. Some documents reflect the hesitation that was probably expressed and the arguments used to reassure and maintain adherence to the plan. A few of these arguments were in keeping with classic themes of millenarian literature not otherwise found in the group's teachings:

The idea of the passage from one world to another might worry some of you. I assure you that you are going towards a marvelous world which could not be, in any case, any worse than the one you are leaving.

Know from now on that after the passage, you will have a body of glory but you will still be recognizable. You will no longer need to eat but if you want to eat, you will be able to do it without earning your bread with the sweat of your brow.

Your eternal body will be subject neither to aging nor to pain nor to sickness.³⁵

According to Solar Temple beliefs, the departure was only possible because on 6 January 1994 the mysterious "Elder Brothers of the Rosy Cross" "effected their Transit for an Elsewhere that only the initiates know and serve."³⁶ Taking off towards superior dimensions, the "Brothers" in some way carried Solar Temple members in their wake, allowing those who were worthy to ascend to a higher level. Significant allusions to this subject can be read in notes found on a diskette in one of the chalets in Salvan (Switzerland): "Take the place of the E[lder] B[rothers] on Venus, so that later on J[upiter?], we will be reunited.

They will precede us, make room for us, show us the way and we will follow them.” According to the declarations of a witness who later perished during the second “transit” in December 1995, Jouret, at a small gathering just before the events of October 1994, explained that if the leadership would cross a new step in effecting a passage from matter to essence, all the subsequent levels would automatically progress one degree.

Even within this perspective of escape from worldly catastrophes and transit to a better world, however, the order’s leaders deemed it fitting to leave something behind for posterity. Only this desire to leave a legacy can explain why the leadership continued to be as active as ever while making preparations for their exit. The exact date of “departure” was probably decided on short notice: the outline of the internal monthly instructions meant for distribution to the members, which was found by police in the chalets in Salvan, continued until May 1995. These instructions were prepared by Jocelyne Di Mambro, who knew about the self-destruction project. If the day or the month had been set a long time in advance, she would certainly not have taken the time to prepare instructions for the period after the set date. The will to leave a legacy and a following behind after the “transit” also shows itself in the initiative of summer 1994 (and up to the eve of the events) to start up a new organization, the Rosicrucian Alliance (*Alliance Rose-Croix*, ARC).

Over the years, it appears the group devoted a great deal of energy to organizing and reorganizing its various subsidiaries. As early as 1991, documents had suggested that the Templar Order should soon make room for “a new Rosicrucian Fraternity”; but there was resistance to this idea in some OTS sectors by believers who were attached to the Templar form. Although there is no real historical connection between the medieval Templar Order and Rosicrucian doctrines, the conjoining of the Temple and the Rosy Cross was nothing new, since such theories had originally appeared in Western occult circles during the eighteenth century.³⁷ According to the teachings of the Solar Temple, “the true Order of the Rosy Cross is . . . the Order of the Temple in its center. . . . More than an esoteric institution at the heart of the Order, it was and it is in truth its secret Church.”³⁸

At a first meeting in Avignon on 9 July 1994, ninety-five out of the one hundred eighteen people present responded positively to the proposition to create a new association. The ARC’s constituent assembly, a purely administrative operation, met with a few people present in Montreux on 13 August 1994. Of the four committee members elected that day, two were found dead in October. The real launching of the ARC took place at a second meeting in Avignon on 24 September 1994, with the theme “The new mission of the Rosy Cross”; the invitation

described the new order as “the natural successor to the OTS.”³⁹ One hundred people were present including eighty-eight dues-paying members plus some of Di Mambro’s entourage. The documents revealed a desire to simplify the organizational structure. Participants had the feeling of a new beginning; the notebook of one of the participants had listed under 24 September, “Meeting of the New Alliance in Avignon.”

A PERSECUTION MANIA

Many of those present on 24 September 1994 were not aware that the hour of the “departure” was approaching. Joseph Di Mambro and those close to him were becoming more and more discouraged, as an audio cassette from spring 1994 in which several core members of the group discussed their “departure” demonstrates. Di Mambro is heard saying,

We are rejected by the whole world. First by the people, the people can no longer withstand us. And our Earth, fortunately she rejects us. How would we leave [otherwise]? We also reject this planet. We wait for the day we can leave . . . life for me is intolerable, intolerable, I can’t go on. So think about the dynamic that will get us to go elsewhere.

Compared with other controversial groups, the Solar Temple encountered very modest opposition; it would be excessive to use the term “persecution,” despite what the group’s spiritual testament would have us believe. In fact, Di Mambro’s loss of a sense of reality made any opposition or criticism intolerable. The legal problems encountered by Jouret and others in Québec in 1993 did nothing to assuage his growing sense of paranoia. After all, the press had reported that several members of the group had been subjected to official surveillance and wiretapping.⁴⁰ This led the core leadership to believe themselves the object of omnipresent police control and the victims of traitors who had infiltrated the movement.

Jocelyne Di Mambro’s difficulties in getting her passport renewed only exacerbated these suspicions. This and the fact that Di Mambro sent a posthumous letter to Charles Pasqua (then French minister of the Interior) gave rise to speculation concerning a mysterious political or criminal background for the OTS’s leader. The explanation is simpler. Di Mambro had traveled several times to Australia, where he attempted to create a “life center.” Suspicious international monetary transfers drew the attention of the Australian police: during the month of October 1993, Di Mambro received on three separate occasions 100,000 dollars from Switzerland, money which was then deposited into bank accounts

he had opened in Sydney. Canberra Interpol asked the French police for information regarding Di Mambro, who had no known resources. The French police squad in charge of financial improprieties wondered if it might be a case of illegal trafficking in foreign currency.

The French consulate in Montreal also became suspicious of the Di Mambros. In March 1994, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs asked the Ministry of the Interior to advise whether it should extend Jocelyne Di Mambro's passport, as the family was unable to provide proof of their residence in Canada and had changed residence five times in five years. Even stranger, Joseph Di Mambro had obtained no less than five passports in seven years, and his visas showed he had made numerous short international trips, including several to Malaysia. By October 1994, the inquiry headed by the financial squad of the French judicial police was still ongoing. As for Jocelyne Di Mambro's passport, the French embassy in Ottawa finally renewed it, but only for three months, and this gave rise to a strange incident. Jocelyne Di Mambro hired a Montreal lawyer to defend her interests in the passport renewal affair. Through an unknown channel (perhaps simply the French consulate?), the lawyer heard about the investigation of his client and her husband and seems to have become reluctant to be associated with the couple and their possibly questionable business affairs. He wrote to Jocelyne Di Mambro on 25 August 1994 to explain to her that the affair had implications that were "political as much as they were legal," and that the non-renewal decision came from the French Ministry of the Interior and was linked "to a police investigation of a criminal matter." Even as he told his client that he would no longer be representing her interests, he advised her to "take very seriously the results of the investigation by the French authorities."⁴¹

In point of fact, during the investigations following the events of October 1994, nothing came to light confirming a surveillance of the group during this period.⁴² Not only did the financial investigations squad of the French police likely have more urgent business to attend to, but the matter appears to have been related only to unexplained financial transfers by an individual French citizen and not by the leader of a small apocalyptic order. The police in Québec ceased their surveillance of the Solar Temple after the incident with the illegal gun purchase in 1993, and the French *Renseignements généraux* (political police), which also keep an eye on religions and "cults," knew little about the Solar Temple. But one can imagine what the lawyer's statement could have meant for an increasingly paranoid leadership, which now believed that its worst suspicions were confirmed. It is significant that the document sent in October 1994 to Charles Pasqua (enclosed with the Di Mambro's passports) was written on a computer at Salvan on 30 August 1994—just after the Di Mambros received the

letter from their Montreal lawyer. As Minister of the Interior, Pasqua was held personally responsible for the problems they encountered: "We accuse you of deliberately wanting to destroy our Order and having done so for reasons of state."⁴³ Such writings confirm the Di Mambros' growing persecution paranoia, but lend no credibility to the theories linking the letter to Pasqua with mysterious underworld connections.

Another text found on Jocelyne Di Mambro's computer and written after a conversation with an unknown speaker adds further evidence of a growing sense of persecution:

We are far from knowing the whole truth about the surveillance. Police all over the world are concentrating on us. Our file is coded, nobody has access except the leaders (it is on Pasqua's desk).

We don't know when they might close the trap on us . . . a few days? a few weeks?

We are being followed and spied upon in our every move. All the cars are equipped with tracing and listening devices.

All of their most sophisticated techniques are being used on us. While in the house, beware of surveillance cameras, lasers, and infra-red.

Our file is the hottest on the planet, the most important of the last ten years, if not of the century.

However that may be, as it turns out, the concentration of hate against us will give us enough energy to leave.⁴⁴

The alleged surveillance was construed as one more proof that the group was really what it claimed to be, the vehicle of a mission of cosmic magnitude. The previous document also mentions two members (one of whom died in Switzerland and the other a year later in France) suspected of infiltrating the movement. Several texts written during that period warn against "traitors," and the group believed in the right of applying "justice and sentence" to those who showed disloyalty. In a videotape dated September 1994, Di Mambro explains that "justice and sentence" are the equivalent of "vengeance," but in an impersonal sense. In the spring 1994 audio track about the "departure," Di Mambro talks about those "who had committed themselves and then no longer wanted to remain involved. That changes nothing about their commitment. . . . You'll see, you'll see how things will go for them." The letter to Charles Pasqua is explicit:

If we must apply our justice ourselves, it is because of the fact that yours is rotten and corrupt. . . . It behooves us, before we leave these stinking terrestrial

planes, to reduce certain traitors to silence, which you and your agencies have directly or indirectly manipulated . . . to destroy our honor and our actions.⁴⁵

While it cannot be doubted that the external opposition encountered by the Solar Temple strengthened the resolve of its leaders to depart for a higher plane of existence,⁴⁶ the root of Di Mambro's decision to launch the process which led to the "transit" is most closely connected to internal dissent (the theoretical idea of the possibility of having to "depart" having already been present longer in the ideology of the group, as we have seen). Di Mambro nourished a deep resentment toward critical members and former members, although these dissidents had kept their criticism within the confines of the group and had not gone public—except for the ex-member who spoke with the media in Martinique in December 1992 and who had repeated her accusations to the Canadian media in March 1993.⁴⁷ In the important tape recording (mentioned earlier) of a discussion within the core group in spring 1994, Di Mambro declared to his most trusted disciples,

There are people who claim that I have taken everything for me. . . . what I have taken, I haven't taken it for me, since I leave everything behind. But I will leave nothing, I will leave ashes, I will leave nothing to the bastards who have betrayed us. The harm they have done to the Rosy Cross, that I cannot forgive; what they have done to me, it doesn't matter. But the harm they have done to the Rosy Cross, I won't forgive it. I cannot.⁴⁸

Di Mambro still harbored feelings of betrayal and resentment during the final hours of his life. On 3 October 1994, when the "transit" had begun and a number of victims had in all likelihood already lost their lives, Di Mambro (or one of his assistants) wrote two drafts of letters to a general attorney which accused two former members of blackmailing him and of tarnishing the Temple's reputation.⁴⁹

THE CREATION OF A LEGEND

As already asserted, however, it was not just a matter of "leaving" and punishing "traitors," but of accomplishing these ends in such a manner as to leave behind an enduring legend. The group was convinced that it belonged to "the pivotal elite" which "has been removed from the collective by superhuman effort." The temple "did not recognize" itself "as belonging to the human world, but to the race of Gods."⁵⁰

The leaders of the Solar Temple explained their actions in the texts sent to the media from a Geneva post office on 5 October 1994,

and in three videocassettes which were shipped to a French OTS member by another trusted member at the same time. Two of these cassettes are titled “Testament of the Rosy Cross,” and the third is titled “Joseph of Arimathea—Messages.”

The lengthy recording of the “Testament of the Rosy Cross” opens with the symbol of ARC (a double-headed eagle behind a rose with a cross). On the screen a seated woman appears⁵¹ who reads a text; in the background, a rose emerges from a misty landscape; as background music, the Grail theme from Richard Wagner’s opera *Lohengrin* plays throughout the entire lecture.⁵² The lengthy “testament” is read with a growing exaltation; there are several mentions of “departure.” This “Testament of the Rosy Cross” is most interesting because of its synthesis of Solar Temple beliefs on the eve of the group’s self-immolation.

The testament first underlines man’s mission as mediator between God and the Earth: “We are the focalization on which the Creator rests. . . . Today, we are in the final cycle of conscious creation; we must be able to control these bodies . . . and, with full maturity, to leave the mother [i.e. the Earth]. . . . We must not bring back consciousness to the state before the fall, but become aware of this state, enrich it with the painful experience of the fall and redeem our being, so that we could continue after the fall with a capital of enriched consciousness-energy-love.” In this way, the spirit is able to follow its route across the sublimation of matter and, enriched by its experience in matter, “start up a superior cycle of evolution.”⁵³

According to the testament, 26,000 years ago the Blue Star (related to Sirius’ energy) left on the earth “Sons of the One”; it appears in the sky every time its help is needed and responds to magnetization when humanity undergoes its crises of transmutation. The years 1950 to 1960 saw a growing change in the consciousness of human beings. Humanity is passing through periods of preparation called “tribulations,” successive cycles of seven years which end in 1998. The circumstances of the “departure” are then explained:

In the 1980s, the Sons of the One called the Blue Star. With man’s consciousness still too fragmented, it was asked of the spiritual forces to intervene and to allot an additional period of time to move back the date, to slow down the irrevocable changes on Earth. . . . The Earth was given an additional seven years to prepare. . . . This delay acts like a rubber band which, when stretched to its limit, becomes unstable and too powerful. This limit has been reached. . . . and we still need more time. But this delay given to us has nonetheless allowed beings to hear the message, to prepare and to participate with full consciousness in this unique event which we call the passage. The passage, which is also the gathering of the Sons of the One. The Blue Star has come to magnetize the last workers and bring them back towards those of the first hour. The time of return is at hand and the astrological influences are affecting all the physical and non-physical planes.

Nova Religio

They work on the hearts and spirits of all those who accept their divine origin and are ready to play their part until the end. At the moment of passage, the Blue Star . . . will instantly transform in a flash the carriers of life and of the consciousness.

The Star will unleash its influence on the earth, and there man, the unbeliever, remaining on Earth, will hope for death. The Blue Star will leave, he will feel abandoned and he will be right, but it will be too late. The radiant Star will be gone, bringing with it every chance at redemption. Yet, if man had wanted to remember, wanted to hear, wanted to see . . . Why did he not seize his last chance, brought by the Blue Star?⁵⁴

The third cassette is a composite of four elements: three messages received from above by one of the members and a strange sequence that Di Mambro wanted to leave to posterity. In a room that looks like a church crypt, we see through a doorway, in front of a large pillar, people's profiles, one by one, whom it is not possible to identify because they are dressed in ample capuchin capes pulled around their faces. They process in a slow and untiring march, each holding in both hands a lit candle. This mysterious procession is commented on by the voice of Joseph Di Mambro and a member of the fraternity:

JDM: Space is curved, time comes to an end . . . Our cycle is over, these images tell all.

F: On 6 January 1994, at 0h15m, the Elder Brothers of the Rosy Cross left their terrestrial planes, preceded by entities from the Great Pyramid who have gone back to their original planes. Programmed for all eternity, this unique event in history confirms the truth and the actualization of the prophecies that warned man that one day, because of [mankind's] disdain for the Word, the Gods would leave the earth. . . . A unique time is coming to an end as these knights, anonymous by choice, last carriers of the original fire, prepare in their turn to proceed, by their own means, with the liberation of the capital of energy-consciousness which the Rosy Cross bequeathed to them until the completion of the work.

JDM: The good-hearted man can live in this precise second . . . a sublime event: the passage of the cycle of Adamic man towards a new cycle of evolution, programmed on another earth, an earth prepared to receive the stored vibrations enriched by the authentic servants of the Rosy Cross.⁵⁵

This solemn scene is meant to symbolize the final procession of the Knights of the Solar Temple, who are leaving this Earth: "Noble travelers, we are of no era, of no place."⁵⁶ If there were still a need to demonstrate that Di Mambro planned to create and leave behind a grand legend concerning his order's transit, this "choreography" offers persuasive evidence.

THE END OF THE SOLAR TEMPLE

On 4 October 1994, at 1:40 P.M. (Swiss time), Canadian police intervened at a fire in Morin Heights and discovered two adult corpses. On 6 October, the corpses of two parents who had been savagely murdered were found with their baby child hidden in a closet. It was later discovered that the murders had occurred on 30 September and that the perpetrators had subsequently flown back to Switzerland. Also on 4 October, a little before midnight, residents of the small Swiss village of Cheiry noticed that a fire had started at the La Rochette farm in the heights around the village. On Wednesday, 5 October, around 3 A.M., three chalets were in flames at another place in Switzerland, Granges-sur-Salvan. Twenty-three corpses were discovered at Cheiry, twenty-five at Salvan. In Cheiry, most of the victims had apparently been called to a meeting on Sunday and were probably already dead on Monday, 3 October. A total of sixty-five bullets were found in their heads, and most of the victims had absorbed a strong soporific before being shot. No firearm had been used at Salvan, where only members of the core group lived; they had been injected with a poisonous substance provided by Jouret.

It has been clearly established that some of the fifty-three victims were murdered, while others submitted to execution voluntarily. However, even if their deaths were technically assassinations (bullets in the head), we will never know with absolute certainty how many victims volunteered for their "departure" or how many realized beforehand that the fabulous voyage to another planet they had been hoping for would take such brutal form.

The fact that members who were fully cognizant of the macabre details of this "departure" and who were deeply affected by the loss of long-standing friends nevertheless decided, in December 1995, to themselves "leave" (again using firearms) in a clearing in French Vercors left many observers in such a state of incredulity that a number of journalists advanced the hypothesis of external intervention. But no such trace has been found (which would have been easy, since the area was snowy), and without ruling out the possibility that some victims did not fully consent or wanted to back out at the last minute, the deeds of these members are explicable without the intervention of a third party. It is true that several OTS survivors (including victims of the December 1995 "transit") were troubled over the methods used in October 1994. However, this discomfort did not stop a few of them from recognizing that they would have responded to the call if it had been addressed to them, or indeed from feeling a little disappointed not to have been invited to participate.

Several testimonies collected by the Swiss police after the event of December 1995 show that a process of reinterpretation was quickly

elaborated among the core of the surviving believers, leading to the conclusion that what happened was in fact positive and that those who departed had sacrificed to save the consciousness of the planet and to pave the way for others. In their eyes, the “departure” conjoined the horrible and the sublime in a strange harmony. They came to the decision to follow the same path, probably convinced that the first group was waiting for them.⁵⁷ The death of five more persons in Québec in March 1997 follows the same pattern, and the letter sent to the media by this handful of hard-liners articulates their doubts that there remain other people ready to follow the same path after them.⁵⁸

Scholarly observers have advanced varied interpretations of the Solar Temple’s saga.⁵⁹ Whatever the primary cause of the “transit,” it was not a hasty decision, and the core group took time and care to legitimate ideologically the suicides and murders. This process probably also helped them reinforce each other in their choices, which had to be agreed upon collectively. Moreover, they likely celebrated ceremonies that ritualized their beliefs concerning the act they were about to commit near the time of the final departure. Texts detailing these ceremonies were discovered at Di Mambro’s residence at Salvan. They strikingly illustrate the mind-set of the core group with regard to the coming transit:

Brothers and Sisters of the First and of the Last Hour . . .
Today . . . as we are gathered here in this Holy Place . . .
The Great Terrestrial Cycle is closing in on itself.
Alpha and Omega are fusing [to initiate] a new Creation.
The Time of the Great Gathering is proclaiming the Departure
of the Sons of Heaven.

In the Name of a Will above mine . . .
I am handing the seed of our Immortality and of our
Transcendent Nature to the Infinite Worlds . . .
At this Supreme Moment . . .
The ruby power of the Work should free itself and rejoin the
Levels of the Future . . .
So that, engendered by ourselves . . .
Like the Phoenix . . .
We might be reborn from our ashes.
Through the Sword of Light . . .
Raised toward the Levels Above, what is refined should depart
from the world of density . . .
And ascend toward its Point of Origin.

Our Terrestrial Journey is coming to an end . . .
The Work is being completed.
Everyone must return to their position on the Great Celestial
Chessboard.⁶⁰

We have to consider seriously the OTS's beliefs. Di Mambro acted at times like a common swindler, but he very likely remained convinced of his message and mission until the end. Certainly, internal dissent and outside criticism helped to convince hesitant members of the core group that radical methods were needed in order to leave Earth. But, although we will never know for sure, it seems doubtful that a lesser degree of public exposure would have prevented the "transit." Even if he was able to hide such feelings when it was needed, Di Mambro had reached the point that he could no longer accept questioning of or disagreement with his views. Convinced of their own superiority and insulated psychologically from countervailing perspectives, the leadership came to view any dissonant voice as unbearable.

Finally, the transit presented an attractive response to the movement's decline: the temple needed to be "re-dynamized" periodically. The transit also allowed the group to escape from perceived threats and offered a way to assert dramatically its claims before the entire world. Creators of their own legend, the core members of the Solar Temple considered themselves as an elect circle, heirs to an uncommon destiny who were invested with a cosmic task to fulfill. Believing that they would become gods, they followed the flute player in a dance of death and paid the ultimate price.

ENDNOTES

¹ Concluding text from two videocassettes titled, "Testament of the Rosy Cross," sent from Geneva to a member of the OTS on 5 October 1994.

² This quote is excerpted from a tape transcript made for the use of the police investigation. All documents without specific indication of source belong to the material gathered by the police and kept either in Fribourg or in Martigny (Switzerland). These documents are not individually numbered, and they are not presently accessible to researchers; the author has been able to use them solely because of his participation in the official police investigation of the Solar Temple case. Regarding quotes from interrogations conducted by the police with witnesses, they can be included only if the anonymity of the individuals quoted remains fully protected. For this reason, it is not possible to provide references in the usual way.

³ Taken from a document dated 28 May 1994 found on one of the order's computers. Rituals celebrated toward the end, especially one called "The Return of the Fire," develop such ideas and show how the core members had the feeling of being in control of events when committing suicide and returning to their original home after having been enriched through their experiences.

⁴ "Transit to the Future," one of four texts delivered to several dozen recipients on 5 October 1994. All the (unpublished) internal documents of OTS quoted in these footnotes were written in French, but their titles are translated here into English.

⁵ An original, longer version of this study was published in French as *Les Mythes du Temple Solaire* (Geneva: Georg, 1996). A revised and updated Italian translation was published

the following year as *Il Tempio Solare* (Leumann [Torino]: Editrice Elle Di Ci, 1997). There is also an updated and extended German version, *Der Sonnentempel: Die Tragödie einer Sekte* (Freiburg: Paulusverlag, 1998). The English version has been rewritten to a large extent and also contains several passages and quotes which are not found in the previous versions. The author thanks the three anonymous reviewers for their critical comments: he has tried to take several of their remarks into consideration. Comparisons with other cases of suicide or violent action by religious groups, however, will be kept for a future article. This one concentrates exclusively upon the OTS case.

⁶ There were always people who belonged to the inner “Fraternity” around Di Mambro and never to OTS itself. Hence the use of “OTS” as a generic label can be misleading.

⁷ He divorced his first wife in January 1985, but she continued to follow the group and was found dead at Cheiry in October 1994.

⁸ Although it is used here generically for describing the group, the name “Order of the Solar Temple” was only one label among several and was not always in use between 1970 and 1994.

⁹ Some attendees with whom the author spoke did not like Jouret’s apocalyptic leanings. He sometimes conveyed the ambiguous impression that he was possessed of both charm and fanaticism.

¹⁰ An overview of the various (and sometimes unconnected) movements with reference to the Neo-Templar tradition is provided in the first part of an article by Massimo Introvigne, “Ordeal by Fire: The Tragedy of the Solar Temple,” *Religion* 25 (1995): 267-83.

¹¹ Gaetan Delaforge, *The Templar Tradition in the Age of Aquarius* (Putney, Vermont: Threshold Books, 1987), 136. “Gaetan Delaforge” is the pseudonym of a North American OTS member (who is still alive).

¹² See Serge Caillet, *L’Ordre Rénové du Temple. Aux racines du Temple Solaire* (Paris: Dervy, 1997). There is no relation between the French citizen Raymond Bernard and his American homonym who wrote books on the “hollow earth” theory and other topics popular in some segments of the cultic milieu; according to information provided by Joscelyn Godwin, the (late) American Raymond Bernard’s real name was Walter Siegmeister (Joscelyn Godwin, *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival* [London: Thames and Hudson, 1993], 122).

¹³ Tape of conclave of ORT officers, Easter 1984, Geneva, Switzerland, found in personal archives of Joseph Di Mambro.

¹⁴ Delaforge, *The Templar Tradition*, 138.

¹⁵ Open Letter, February 1994. See footnote 2.

¹⁶ However, there were several other members who remained totally devoted to Joseph Di Mambro, as their decision to follow him in death demonstrates. Regarding the question of the nature of Di Mambro’s charisma, see Jean-François Mayer, “Les Chevaliers de l’Apocalypse: l’Ordre du Temple Solaire et ses adeptes,” in *Sectes et Démocratie*, eds. Françoise Champion and Martine Cohen (Paris: Seuil, 1999), 205-23. The article also examines the interaction between affiliations with the Solar Temple and previous backgrounds in the cultic milieu.

¹⁷ He justified this demand by claiming that he was only relaying the orders from the “Mother Lodge.”

¹⁸ Interrogation of former member by Canadian police, 28 December 1994. See note 2.

¹⁹ Tony Dutoit, his wife, and their baby child were the first victims of the carnage of 1994, savagely murdered in Morin Heights (Québec).

²⁰ Report to Joseph Di Mambro by OTS officer, Switzerland, 10 December 1993. See note 2.

²¹ *Les Sectes: que sont-elles? comment agissent-elles? comment s’en défendre? ce qu’il faut en savoir* (Paris: Centre de Documentation, d’Education et d’Action contre les Manipulations

Mentales, 1984), 49. In 1987, during a discussion with the author, Jouret did not hide his irritation concerning those two lines.

²² For more details about the ecological concern behind the apocalyptic views of the Solar Temple, see Mayer, "Les Chevaliers de l'Apocalypse," 211-14.

²³ See also the interesting observations by Susan Palmer, "Purity and Danger in the Solar Temple," *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 11 (1996): 303-18.

²⁴ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1958), 67. "The reawakening of the gnostic conscience in a few human beings is considered as the sign that the diffuse parcels of light dispersed in the world will reunite and that apocalyptic events are imminent" (Massimo Introvigne, *Il ritorno dello gnosticismo* [Milano: SugarCo, 1993], 15-16).

²⁵ "To those who can still hear the voice of wisdom . . . we send this final message," Manifesto-testament of OTS, 1994, 2.

²⁶ "Transit to the future," Manifesto-testament of OTS, 1994, 5.

²⁷ Appel Guery and Sergio Macedo, *Voyage intemporel* (Grenoble, France: Glénat, 1983). There exists an English translation, *Timeless Voyage* (Papeete, Tahiti: Transtar Pacific, 1987).

²⁸ This is not merely a comic strip, because it carries the message of a French UFO group which really exists.

²⁹ "The current planetary situation is irreversibly escaping all human control . . . All creative and positive forces are strangled . . . we refuse to participate in the assassination of our carrier the Earth, we leave this world where our voices can no longer be heard" ("Transit to the Future"). "Once the time of the Great gathering will have come and the Sons of the One will withdraw, . . . the North and South Poles, deprived of their magnetic balance which had until now been kept by the conscious carriers, will give birth to cataclysms and final destruction. This is the Third secret of Our Lady of Fatima, which is revealed here" (from a document dated 28 April 1994 found on a computer in Salvan, Switzerland).

³⁰ From interrogation of former OTS member by Swiss police, 18 January 1996. See note 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 22 January 1996.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ John R. Hall and Philip Schuyler, "The Mystical Apocalypse of the Solar Temple," in *Millennium, Messiahs, and Mayhem: Contemporary Apocalyptic Movements*, eds. Thomas Robbins and Susan J. Palmer (London: Routledge, 1997), 300.

³⁴ "The Polestar," a series of five OTS messages found at Salvan, Switzerland, December 1993–January 1994. See note 2.

³⁵ "Last Voyage," document found at Salvan, Switzerland, 1993. See note 2.

³⁶ Message dated 28 January 1994.

³⁷ See René Le Forestier, *La Franc-Maçonnerie occultiste et templière aux XVIII^e et XIX^e siècles*, 2d ed., 2 vols. (Paris: La Table d'Emeraude, 1987).

³⁸ "Epistle/Archives ZZA-4," OTS teaching material sent to members, n.d. See note 2.

³⁹ OTS invitation to meeting, 24 September 1994. See note 2.

⁴⁰ This wiretapping was conducted over several weeks spanning February and March 1993.

⁴¹ Letter from Di Mambro's lawyer in Montreal, 25 August 1994. See note 2.

⁴² It should, however, be mentioned that the French embassy in Washington, D.C. sent a request to law enforcement agencies in Canada in early 1994 requesting information concerning possible involvement of Joseph Di Mambro in money laundering. It is not known if active investigations were undertaken following this request.

⁴³ Letter sent by Di Mambro to French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua in October 1994. See note 2.

⁴⁴ Untitled document found on computer at Salvan, Switzerland. See note 2.

⁴⁵ Letter sent by Di Mambro to French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua in October 1994. See note 2.

⁴⁶ In a recent article, two American scholars have very pointedly observed that the “critical issue seems to concern whether the group’s principals can legitimate to their followers the claim of persecution by apostates and other external opponents as the basis of their troubles.” See John R. Hall and Philip Schuyler, “Apostasy, Apocalypse, and Religious Violence: An Exploratory Comparison of Peoples Temple, the Branch Davidians, and the Solar Temple,” in *The Politics of Religious Apostasy: The Role of Apostates in the Transformation of Religious Movements*, ed. David G. Bromley (London: Praeger, 1998), 168.

⁴⁷ In a few cases, dissidents were threatening to go public with their criticisms in an attempt to recoup financial contributions.

⁴⁸ Transcript of tape, Spring 1994. See note 2.

⁴⁹ For unknown reasons, the letters were never completed or mailed.

⁵⁰ From a document entitled “Exit toward the light,” end of 1993. See note 2.

⁵¹ The woman was one of Joseph Di Mambro’s most convinced followers. In the spring 1994 audiocassette, already cited several times, this woman is shown as one of those most in favor of the idea of a “departure”: “Yes, I have asked for that for a long time, I think I will have no regrets. . . . I think I will have no doubts or fears. . . . I am ready to leave.”

⁵² Di Mambro enjoyed Wagner’s music, which was often used in OTS ceremonies.

⁵³ Excerpt from two videocassettes called “Testament of the Rosy Cross.” See note 1.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Excerpt from third videocassette sent with “Testament of the Rosy Cross.” See note 1.

⁵⁶ Sometimes used by OTS members, this phrase is actually borrowed from the famous occultist and adventurer, Cagliostro, whose real name was Giuseppe Balsamo (1743–1795). Di Mambro considered himself a reincarnation of Cagliostro. The author wishes to thank Massimo Introvigne for bringing the original author of this phrase to his attention.

⁵⁷ Internal documents show that the leadership was considering the possibility (and hoping) that other people would follow at a later stage. The manifesto “To those who can still hear the voice of wisdom” concludes with the following sentence: “From where we will be, we will always hold our arms toward those who will be worthy of joining us.” It is difficult to establish accurately how far the media harassment and the wild theories spread about the group contributed to the resolve of surviving OTS members to “leave” in December 1995 and March 1997. The conclusions of the French investigation have not yet been made public at the time of the last revisions to this article (November 1998).

⁵⁸ Letter sent 21 March 1997 to leading newspapers in Québec including *La Presse*, *Le Devoir*, and *Le Soleil*.

⁵⁹ For an overview of the various interpretative categories, see Massimo Introvigne, *Les Veilleurs de l’Apocalypse: Millénarisme et nouvelles religions au seuil de l’an 2000* (Paris: Claire Vigne, 1996), 223–45.

⁶⁰ Ritual entitled “The Return of the Fire,” n.d., found at Salvan, Switzerland, with manuscript corrections. See note 2.