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Authority and Memory within the French Gnostic Catholic Church. Reimagining Early Christianity in the Early 20th Century

Abstract: Die Nachwelen der Französischen Revolution führten zur Entstehung mehrerer kirchlicher Gruppierungen, die ihren Verlust der Kirchengemeinschaft mit Rom mit spezifisch esoterischen Programmatiken zu kompensieren suchten. Durch ihren Bruch mit der Kontinuität des Petrusamtes, sahen sich die Protagonisten dieser Szene gezwungen sich mit alternativen Legitimationsstrategien zu befassen. Dies führte sie zur Erwägung jener frühchristlichen Gruppen, die in der Forschungsgeschichte der Gnosis zugeschrieben und von der spätantiken Reichskirche als häretisch deklariert worden waren. Zeitgleich schritt die junge akademische Disziplin der Koptologie voran und machte koptische Primärquellen wie *Pistis Sophia* einem breiten Publikum in französischer Übersetzung erstmals zugänglich. Durch die Integration von jenen damals neu veröffentlichten spätantiken Quellen als auch durch einen Wiederaufgriff der katholischen Ekklesiologie zielte die *Église Gnostique Catholique* von Jean Bricaud darauf ab, eine angeblich ursprüngliche Form eines esoterischen Christentums neu zu imaginieren. Form, Funktion, Entstehungsgeschichte und Legitimationsstrategien von Bricauds Neugründung und der darin erfolgten Antikenrezeption sollen mittels der theoretischen Rahmen von Gedächtnisgeschichte und Intertextualität untersucht werden.

1 Introduction

The Fin-de-siècle phenomenon of the French Neo-Gnostic Movement and its various offshoots formed at the first half of the 20th century, received little attention from academic scholarship – a strange circumstance, given the richness of its material: A material which offers insights into the reception, reimagination, and appropriation of early Christian movements which have been deemed heretical by the proto-orthodox Apostolic and Church Fathers. By drawing on ancient primary sources and modern scholarship from the fields of Patristics and Coptic Studies

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alike, the Neo-Gnostic Movement sought legitimacy outside of the reach of the Patriarchal Seat of Saint Peter: Meticulously, counter-narratives and counter-memories to the legacy of Roman Catholicism have been developed to promote an allegedly primeval form of Christian esotericism.

This development began in 1890, when the librarian, Freemason, and Spiritulist Jules Doinel (1842–1902) founded the *Église Gnostique* after reporting to have had visions of Jesus as a celestial *aeon* – a benevolent celestial being as featured within the mythological system of the early Christian current of Valentinianism.¹ Doinel's church was the first modern organization which identified itself with ancient Gnosticism.² Doinel, who grew up in a pious Roman Catholic family and lived the novitiate within the Society of Jesus, claimed from early in his life to have had visions of the Roman Catholic Saints Stanislaus Kotska and Francis Xavier. Yet, with the foundation of his Gnostic Church, he opted to leave Roman Catholicism behind by focusing the narrative of his church on the late ancient church teacher Valentinus – who was deemed a heretic by the Church Fathers – and a sacramental system attributed unto the medieval Cathars.³ In other words, Doinel's vision of a Gnostic Church rendered the interpretation of Catholic ecclesiology according to the Roman magisterium superfluous to himself. He reported to have been spiritually consecrated as “Bishop of Montségur,” both by a deceased Cathar bishop contacted in a séance as well as by the *aeon* Jesus himself. Thus, he proclaimed the “era of gnosis restored,” without foreseeing that as early as 1908 the first neognostic schism would occur.⁴

With the formation of the *Église Catholique Gnostique* (ECG), later known as *Église Gnostique Universelle* (EGU), by the former Roman Catholic seminarian Jean Bricaud (1881–1934), the question of catholicity reemerged: even though still opposed to the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, this church returned to a strict adherence to the principles of Catholic ecclesiology. Bricaud emphasized the preservation and validity of Holy Orders by virtue of the Apostolic Succession. He removed the Cathar elements, which were so highly esteemed by Doinel. In

1 Plummer, John P.: *The Many Paths of the Independent Sacramental Movement*, Berkeley, CA: Apocryphile Press 2005, 32.

2 Winterberg, Alberto Alfredo: *Remembering the Gnostics: The mnemohistorical incorporation of Ancient Gnosticism within Neo-Gnostic Churches*, in: *La Rosa di Paracelso. La ricerca della Gnosì. Conoscenza superiore ed evoluzione del pensiero gnostico nell'Esoterismo occidentale* 1–2/2018, 47–64.

3 Introvigne, Massimo: *Il ritorno dello gnosticismo*, Varese: SugarCo Edizioni 1993, 98. Pearson, Joanne: *Wicca and the Christian Heritage. Ritual, Sex and Magic*, New York: Routledge 2007, 46.

4 Pearson: *Wicca*, 46–47.

short, rather than trying to replace Catholicism, as Doinel intended, Bricaud presented a modified version thereof.

Whereas past research has categorized the whole of the French Neo-Gnostic Movement as pertaining to the New Religious Movements, it has not pointed out that Catholic ecclesiology and sacramental theology remain important providers of legitimacy. The few existing publications dealing with the French Neo-Gnostics do indeed trace the historical genesis of their movement from modern French esotericism.⁵ However, they neglect an actual analysis of any theological content, and how it was generated by drawing on late antique sources, including such esteemed as orthodox as well as heterodox from the Roman Catholic perspective. Hence, this paper shall consider Jean Bricaud's reading of late ancient Christian sources and Catholic tradition as important providers of theological contents and legitimacy for the Gnostic Catholic Church. Indeed, the protagonists of the Neo-Gnostic Movement were often correctly noted for their personal connections with Freemasonry and Martinism and read along these lines.⁶ However, their adherence to esoteric thought cannot be reduced to the influence of the aforementioned modern movements. It can only be understood as reproducing a *forma mentis* which is inherent to the cultural matrix of the Catholic Church itself. This is most distinctively exemplified by Patristic authors such as Clement of Alexandria, Origen of Alexandria, or even the Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nyssa.⁷

By drawing on theories derived from the fields of memory studies and intertextual studies, two complexes shall be addressed: On the one hand, *how* did Bricaud reimagine late ancient Christian texts and traditions at his time? This shall elaborate the question of origination. On the other hand, *to what end* did this re-

5 Some of the most important monographs are Introvigne's *Il ritorno dello gnosticismo* (cf. footnote 3) and Le Forestier, René: *L'Occultisme en France aux XIX^{ème} et XX^{ème} siècles. L'Église Gnostique*, Milano: Archè 1990. A timeline of the development of French Neo-Gnosticism is presented in Frick, Karl Richard: *Licht und Finsternis. Gnostisch-theosophische und freimaurerisch-okkulte Geheimgesellschaften bis an die Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert. Wege in die Gegenwart. Teil 2: Geschichte ihrer Lehren, Rituale und Organisationen*, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt 1978. Pearson: *Wicca* provides also a comprehensive historical overview. Yet, none of these publications goes into an analysis of the late antique contents. An analysis of the late antique material in the *Ecclesia Gnostica Catholica* – a successor organization of the French *Église Gnostique Catholique* – has been published in my article *Remembering the Gnostics* (Winterberg: *Remembering*).

6 As, for example, in Frick and Introvigne.

7 Cf. Itter, Andrew: *Esoteric Teaching in the Stromateis of Clement of Alexandria*, Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill 2009. Daniélou, Jean: *Platonisme et théologie mystique. Essai sur la doctrine spirituelle de Saint Grégoire de Nysse*, Paris: Aubier 1944. Stroumsa, Guy: *Clement, Origen, and Jewish esoteric traditions*, in: *Hidden Wisdom*, ed. Guy Stroumsa, Leiden: Brill 2005, 109–131.

ception and reimagination of late antiquity take place? Hence, this reception of late antiquity must be contextualized within the early 20th century itself. By turning to the principle of Apostolic Succession and the creed of the EGC, an initial example for this understudied field shall be conveyed within this paper.

As for the complex of memory studies, I propose to adopt the concept of mnemohistory: a theory developed by the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877–1945), and significantly expanded by the German Egyptologist Jan Assmann. This aspect shall sharpen our understanding of how and why legitimacy is constructed within the EGC. Moreover, with a recourse to intertextual theory, we shall analyze how Bricaud's neognostic creed is dependent on late antique textual precursors. In a word, this paper shall demonstrate how, by drawing on a mnemonic framework from late antique sources and Catholic ecclesiology alike, the EGC sought to legitimize itself both in front of orthodox Catholicism and the French esoteric scene of its time. What is more, it attempted to establish an alternative and esoteric form of Catholicism by drawing on the memory of late antique Gnosticism.

Section 2 of this paper will provide an extensive discussion of theory and methodology. Thereafter, a brief introduction to the historical background which ultimately gave rise to the Neo-Gnostic Movement shall be given in section 3. Section 4 shall briefly sketch the emergence of Jean Bricaud's Gnostic Catholic Church, and its recourse to Apostolic Succession. Concludingly, section 5 shall apply the theories introduced in section 2 to the case study of Bricaud's Gnostic Creed and present an attempt to answer the research questions.

2 Mnemohistory, Cultural Memory, and Hypertextuality: Studying the French Gnostic Movement

Jan Assmann distinguishes between two differing analytical categories for researching history and historiography. The first – and most common – category he calls *archaeology*. Thereby not only the academic discipline of the same name is meant, but an approach which tries to uncover “the past as it was.”⁸ Archaeological historiography aims at the reconstruction of an original state. Its quest lies in

⁸ Assmann, Jan: Der Platz Ägyptens in der Gedächtnisgeschichte des Abendlandes, in: Kulturtherien der Gegenwart. Ansätze und Positionen, ed. Gerhart Schröder et al., Frankfurt: Campus 2001, 59.

determining the causes and origins of a given subject, hence it tries to get hold of the *ἀρχή*. Yet, studying given subjects from this perspective “should be carefully distinguished from the study of their commemoration, traditions, and transformation in the collective memory.”⁹ Memory itself forms the means to interact with the past, hence it is “not simply the storage of past ‘facts’ but the ongoing work of reconstructive imagination,” both encompassing individual and social capacity.¹⁰ Yet, memories, and the past contained therein, are not statically stored, but always mediated and processed, dependent on “semantic frames and needs of a given individual or society within a given present.”¹¹

This reconstructive imagination is the object of inquiry of mnemohistory. In other words, mnemohistory does not ask whether a given memory about a subject is historically true. This does not change the effect it exercises on a given present, in which it is remembered. Therefore, mnemohistory acknowledges that memories are retroactively formed in the present.

Psychology and related fields acknowledge that memories may be wrong, distorted, fictive, or implemented by artificial means.¹² This does not devalue their relevance. On the contrary: one could say what counts for a memory to have an effect is its actuality, and not its factuality.¹³ The social dimension of memories has been pointed out by Maurice Halbwachs, who argued that memories do not persist as such, but only as long as they serve a purpose: For the French sociologist, historical pasts are collective reconstructions which are intended to provide belonging to a community.¹⁴ As Assmann states, the truth of the memory lies in the identity which it shapes: “It lies in the story, not as it happened but as it lives on and unfolds in collective memory.”¹⁵

At this point, we should consider cultural memory (“kulturelles Gedächtnis”). This concept was coined by the spouses Aleida and Jan Assmann. At its core lies the assumption that culture provides to human beings “the experience of a commonly inhabited meaningful world” grounded in “shared norms (rules) and stories (memories; Erinnerungen).”¹⁶ We use “orientating symbols of identity” pertaining to our “social world, symbols which are embodied in the objectified forms

⁹ Assmann, Jan: *Moses the Egyptian. The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, London/Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1997, 14.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 9.

¹³ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴ Assmann, Jan: *Religion und kulturelles Gedächtnis. Zehn Studien*, Munich: Beck 2000, 115.

¹⁵ Assmann: *Moses*, 14.

¹⁶ Harth, Dietrich: *Invention of Cultural Memory*, in: *Media and Cultural Memory*, ed. Astrid Erll / Ansgar Nünning, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter 2008, 86.

of a commonly shared cultural tradition.”¹⁷ This is accomplished through memory as a basis. Memory itself possess the property of connectivity: this connectivity can be distinguished into two forms or *modi operandi*, according to Jan and Aleida Assmann.

First, *communicative memory* possesses a connectivity “active on the level of simultaneity, which connects the present and the most recent past.”¹⁸ It processes memories useful to quotidian life: What did I eat for breakfast? Where did I leave my car? *Cultural memory*, however, is the other *modus operandi*. It resembles rather a storehouse which contains “figures of memory.” Traditions draw upon cultural memory.¹⁹ Its mode of connectivity is linking the present to a distant past. However, also cultural memory does not store a static factual past in the archaeological sense. It is an ongoing work of “reconstructive imagination.”²⁰

For investigating the form and function of the Gnostic Catholic Church’s reception of early Christianity in the early 20th century, we shall treat the received ancient motifs and theologoumena as a matter of mnemohistory. One of mnemohistories’ advantages is its agnosticism with regard to the question whether the remembered object is historically accurate in the *archaeological* sense. Yet, it does not denigrate the mnemonic motif’s mythopoetic and actual power it can exercise – rather, it is emphasized *despite* a possible deviation from strict factuality. In this context, the Neo-Gnostics’ attribution to what they believed to be early Christianity is enough, irrespective of historical accuracy. The focus lies on actuality over *factuality*. In other words, we are aiming at tackling the question of what function these ancient Christian motifs fulfill within the esoteric discourse of the early 20th century: a discourse which had the strong tendency to integrate motifs pertaining also to other branches of antiquity, such as the ancient Babylonian or Egyptian civilizations.²¹ Hence, although the mnemohistorical approach is not uncovering new facts about the mnemonic late antique objects themselves, it helps

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Assmann, Jan: Communicative and Cultural Memory, in: Cultural Memory Studies. An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook, ed. Astrid Erll / Ansgar Nünning, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter 2008, 110–111.

20 Assmann: Moses, 14.

21 The list of examples could be vast. To give just two examples, we could refer to Joséphin Péladan (1885–1918), who drew on the Ancient Near East, as present in his 1904 opus *Sémiramis, tragédie en prose*. Otherwise, the reception of Ancient Egypt has been an even more widespread phenomenon, as for example in the work of the Golden Dawn founder Samuel Liddel MacGregor Mathers (1854–1918). Cf. Tully, Caroline: Celtic Egyptians: Isis priests of the lineage of Scota, in: Ancient Egypt in the Modern Imagination. Art, Literature, and Culture, ed. Eleanor Dobson / Nicola Tonks, London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic 2020, 145–160.

to illumine the given present and intention of the Neo-Gnostics who remember them.²²

What is more, also the *archaeological* dimension shall be addressed: By which means has the memory of a given early Christian element been received by the Neo-Gnostics? By investigating the genesis and tradition of the ancient motifs, we can trace which connotations have been already part of the subtext of a given object. For this, I propose to draw on the instruments from the field of intertextual studies:

The French literary theorist Gérard Genette (1930–2018) coined a set of five analytical terms to describe transtextual relationships, which we shall explain briefly. The main advantage of Genette's theoretical framework consists in his analytical (sub-)categories, which do not only describe *that* a given text depends on another given text, but *how* the transformation of a given text is produced within another. However, let us begin with the basic terms.

The first term is *intertextuality*. Genette defines it as “a relationship of copresence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another.”²³ Thereunder he includes a rather unmediated interaction between the given texts: quotation, plagiarism, and allusion.²⁴ The second category is called *paratext*. This category includes elements which surround a given text, such as titles, subtitles, intertitles, prefaces, terminal notes, even book covers, dust jackets, “and many other kinds of secondary signals, whether allographic or autographic.”²⁵ Genette's third analytical term is *metatextuality*. Thereunder he mainly understands commentaries on a given text, “without necessarily citing it.” He subsumes critical textual relationships thereunder.²⁶ Under *architextuality*, Genette understands an abstract taxonomic category, which originates from the differentiation between texts: architextuality is what makes a novel a novel or a poem a poem.²⁷

The last and decisive term for this study is *hypertextuality*. Thereunder Genette describes “any relationship uniting a text B (which I shall call the *hypertext*) to an earlier text A (I shall, of course, call it the *hypotext*), upon which it is grafted in a manner that is not that of commentary.”²⁸ A hypertextual relationship is dis-

22 Assmann: Platz Ägyptens, 59 f.

23 Genette, Gérard: *Palimpsests. Literature in the Second Degree*, Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press 1997, 1–2.

24 Ibid., 2.

25 Ibid., 3.

26 Ibid., 4.

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 5.

tinct from a metatextual relationship by the fact that the latter speaks openly about another given text, whereas the former uses the method of *transformation* as a means of interaction. Genette gives the example of James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Virgil's *Aeneid*: Two transformed hypertexts related to the same hypotext of the *Odyssey*.²⁹ Following up on that, a variety of transformational subcategories elucidate the dynamics of reception of a given text. They may help in illustrating the actual dynamics of reception and receiving, and may encompass terms as *trans-motivation*, *transvaluation*, *extension*, *expansion*, or *amplification*.³⁰ In other words, the categories of Genette serve as analytical tools beyond the simple question of "what" has been received from a given source. Rather, they illustrate characteristics such as shifts of motivation and characterizations of given accounts, extensions on content level, or discrepancies of motivations in the use of the same material between a given hypo- and a given hypertext.

Hence, by employing the concept of *hypertextuality*, we can easily comprehend the relationship between the given ancient textual sources and their modern reception, interpretation, and re-imagination by the French Neo-Gnostic Movement. This will provide a framework for considering the *archaeological* question of *how* the Neo-Gnostic texts emerge. Apart from these textual considerations, we shall briefly illustrate the historical preconditions which gave rise to the Neo-Gnostic Movement.

3 Historical Preconditions

Whereas the foundation of the *Église Gnostique* – the predecessor of the *Église Catholique Gnostique* – in 1890 by Jules Doinel marks the beginning of self-proclaimed Gnosticism in modern times, it must be placed within the context of several waves of newly established churches which described themselves simultaneously as Catholic (with capital C), yet as independent from the See of Saint Peter. Their foundations date as early as the period of the French Revolution.³¹ The Revolution inaugurated not only administrative and economical restrictions on the institution of the Roman Catholic Church, but ultimately led to the death of between two- and three-thousand clergymen: either caused by execution or a rig-

29 Ibid.

30 For an extensive discussion of these terms, cf. Genette.

31 Winterberg: Remembering, 48.

orous treatment within prison confinement.³² By setting up the Civil Constitution of the Clergy, the French Church was drastically reorganized along the lines of Republicanism: Clergymen were forced to swear an oath of submission to the French Republic. The Pope condemned these measures, whereas the government enforced them by restructuring the Catholic Church of France as the so-called Constitutional Church. A schism between jurors and non-jurors would result, which could not be healed before setting up the Napoleonic Concordat of 1801.³³ However, in the aftermath of the concordat, other schismatic churches would blossom. One of the most influential would remain the so-called *Petite Église*, which was formed by Ancien Régime bishops that were asked to resign by Pope Pius VII. to consolidate the Napoleonic political agenda. In turn, the movement stucked to a radical monarchist ideology and tried to conserve a pre-revolutionary form of Gallicanism.³⁴ Whereas the separation between the *Petite Église* and Roman Catholic Church was driven by these political motives, other groups would classify rather as heretical than schismatic from a Roman Catholic perspective. A representative example of this latter category would be the *Église Johannite des Chrétiens Primitifs*, founded by Bernard-Raymond Fabré-Palaprat (1777–1838), which was a “heterodox Catholic cult based on alleged associations between Freemasonry and the Knights Templar.”³⁵ As Joanne Pearson points out, such groups have been focusing on “the revival of heresy, particularly those linked with gnosis such as Catharism and the Templars, and sought to return to the simplicity of an imagined primitive Christianity.”³⁶ Apostolic Succession as a strategy of legitimization remained important. However, often narratives around the Apostolic Succession were modified from those of Catholic orthodoxy. This had consequences of how these groups would approach the history of early and earliest Christianity. For example, Fabré-Palaprat’s group would denounce the orthodox position of the primate of Saint Peter among the apostles. Instead, they would refer to Saint John as *the beloved disciple*, to provide legitimacy and success-

³² Tacket, Timothy / Langlois, Claude: Ecclesiastical Structures and Clerical Geography on the Eve of the French Revolution, in: French Historical Studies, 11/1980, 355.

³³ Cross, Frank Leslie / Livingstone, Elizabeth A.: The Constitutional Church, in: The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church; <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192802903.001.0001/acref-9780192802903-e-1708> (28.03.2022).

³⁴ Allen, Rupert M.A.F.: The Last Sentinels of Gallicanism. The Evolution of La *Petite Église* from Episcopal Protest to Lay Church, online, University of Bristol 2020, https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/files/220110731/Final_Copy_2020_01_23_Allen_RMAF_MPhil.pdf (28.03.2022).

³⁵ Pearson: Wicca, 44.

³⁶ Ibid.

sion to their group.³⁷ In other words, instead of leaving or denouncing Catholicism altogether, such groups would cultivate counter-memories (“Gegenerinnerungen”) to justify their own position as *true* Catholics and *true* successors of the apostles.³⁸ The esoteric French subculture disentangled the concept of Catholicism from *Roman* Catholicism. Similar attempts have been undertaken by Anglicanism, or later with the emergence of the Old Catholic Church.³⁹

Apart from the Apostolic Succession itself, further sources of authority have been sought in the ambience of Catholic groups which were considered heterodox by the institutional Roman Catholic Church. One strategy consisted in altering the biblical canon, or to introduce new authoritative texts. Such an attempt was undertaken by the same Fabré-Palaprat, who drew on an apparently forged “Byzantine” Greek manuscript, the *Lévitikon*, which contained, among other texts, an abridged version of the Gospel of John – the alleged *urtext*. Published by Fabré-Palaprat in 1831 as *Lévitikon, ou exposé des principes fondamentaux de la doctrine des Chrétiens-Catholiques-Primitifs*, this text served to provide a counter-memory to the orthodox canon, and to “prove” the inauthenticity and edited character of the canonical Gospel of John.⁴⁰ A similar strategy, as we shall see, was utilized by the French Neo-Gnostics which – contrary to Palaprat’s *Église Johannite* – meticulously tried to reconstruct their own brand of alleged primeval Christianity by the help of actual ancient texts. This circumstance must be considered in its historical context.

By the end and in the aftermath of the Early Modern Period – in parallel to the unfolding of Egyptology – the disciplines of Early Christian and Coptic Studies would advance significantly. The growing interest in the study of ancient material and oriental languages such as Coptic and Ge’ez can surely be viewed as a product of Orientalism of the British and French Empires.⁴¹ Among this wave we shall mention the acquisition of the first known Coptic Gnostic codex, the *Codex Askewianus*, by the manuscript collector Anthony Askew in London in 1772. It fa-

37 Des Essarts, Léonce Fabre: *Les Hiérophantes, études sur les fondateurs de religions depuis la Révolution jusqu'à ce jour*, Paris: Chacornac 1905, 145.

38 For further elaborations on *counter-memories*, cf. Assmann, Jan: *Kollektives und Kulturelles Gedächtnis. Zur Phänomenologie und Funktion der Gegen-Erinnerung*, in: *Orte der Erinnerung. Denkmal, Gedenkstätte, Museum*, ed. Ulrich Borsdorf / Heinrich Theodor Grütter, Frankfurt am Main/New York: Campus-Verlag 1999, 13–32.

39 Cf. Plummer: *Paths*, 15–23.

40 Fabré-Palaprat, Bernard-Raymond: *Lévitikon ou Exposé des principes fondamentaux de la doctrine des chrétiens-catholiques-primitifs: suivi de leurs évangiles, d'un extrait de la Table d'or . . . et précédé du statut sur le gouvernement de l'Eglise et la hiérarchie lévitique*, Paris: J. Machault 1831.

41 Cf. Said, Edward: *Orientalism*, New York: Pantheon Books 1978.

uously contains the text *Pistis Sophia* – a revelatory dialogue between the resurrected Jesus and his disciples.⁴² Its first edition, including a Latin translation, was published in 1853.⁴³ For the first time, a primary source of late ancient gnostic Christianity – and not a potentially distorted heresiological report – was published. Notwithstanding the outdated character of the 19th century's scholarship, milestones for the comprehension of an unfolding early Christianity and its competing theologies have been published. E.g., Jacques Matter's *Histoire critique du Gnosticisme* (1828), Ernest Renan's volumes of the *Histoire des Origines du Christianisme* (1863–1881), or Émile Amélineau's *Essai sur le gnosticisme égyptien* (1882, published 1887), and also the same Amélineau's French translation of *Pistis Sophia* (1895).

The increasing knowledge and awareness of early Christian sources which were condemned by the Imperial Church, and the scholarship connected to the same, involuntarily provided a fertile ground for the emergence of the French Neo-Gnostics.⁴⁴

4 From the Église Gnostique to the Église Gnostique Catholique

As has been pointed out before, it was the *Grand Orient de France*-Freemason and Spiritualist Jules Doinel who founded the *Église Gnostique* in 1890. Even before this, Doinel became fascinated with heterodox Catholic movements like Jansenism.⁴⁵ He attended the séances of the famous medium Maria de Mariategui ("Lady Caithness"), with whom he allegedly contacted the spirit of the Cathar bishop de Castres. Apart from the impact of an alleged vision of the celestial *aeon* Jesus in 1867, Doinel reported that it was de Castres to have commanded him to

⁴² *Pistis Sophia*, ed. Violet MacDermot / Carl Schmidt, Leiden: Brill 1978, XI.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ This development correlates with the emergence of historicism, which blossomed throughout the 19th century. It "can be narrowly defined as the doctrine or vision according to which social change or historical development follows unconditional laws of succession, giving a direction or meaning to history," as for example in Hegel. See Boudon, Raymond / Bourracaud, François: *Historicism*, in: A Critical Dictionary of Sociology, ed. Raymond Boudon / François Bourracaud / Peter Hamilton (transl.), London: Routledge 1989, 193. In this light we can also comprehend scholarship's emergent awareness of the particularities of the various stages of early Christianity, which would inform the historical consciousness of the Neo-Gnostics.

⁴⁵ Introvigne: *Il ritorno*, 98.

establish the “Assembly of the Paraclete,” the Gnostic Church.⁴⁶ As I point out in my article about the reception of the figure of Simon Magus within the Église Gnostique, Doinel created a synthesis of the sometimes mutually exclusive teachings attributed to the various ancient heresiarchs by the Church Fathers, foremost Simon Magus, Basilides, and Valentinus.⁴⁷ Yet, the Valentinian aspect would remain dominant in his theological discourse, with Matthew Dillon going so far as calling the church “formally Valentinian.”⁴⁸ When fashioning his Gnostic Church, Doinel rejected the sacramental system of the Roman Catholic Church. Instead, he modelled the rituals of his reimagined Gnostic Church on likewise reimagined Cathar rituals.⁴⁹ The absence of Apostolic Succession in terms of Roman Catholicism did not bother Doinel, whose claims to priestly authority derived from his alleged spiritual consecration through the *aeon* Jesus, as has been described initially.⁵⁰

The turning point occurred in 1908, when the former Église Gnostique member and bishop of Lyon, Jean Bricaud, decided to initiate the first schism in the world of Neo-Gnosticism. Departing from internal power struggles in the Église Gnostique, Bricaud founded the *Église Gnostique Catholique*.⁵¹

Born 1881 in the countryside of Ain, the young Bricaud attended the *petit séminaire de Meximieux*. Due to his attraction to things esoteric, he renounced his vocation within the Roman Catholic priesthood. Instead, he pursued a career as a banker in Lyons. In his private life, he joined fraternities such as Freemasonry and Papus’ Martinist Order – apart from his involvement in Doinel’s Gnostic Church.

Resulting from infighting within the same Gnostic Church, Bricaud declared himself Patriarch in 1908. Whereas, as has been pointed out, Doinel’s church tried to convey reimagined ancient Gnostic theology by the aid of likewise reimagined Medieval Cathar rituals, Bricaud would get rid of the Cathar lore. Instead, he would opt for a palimpsest version of Catholicism with his *Église Gnostique Catholique*, later known as *Église Gnostique Universelle*. Whereas how this neognostic schism affected the exact number of followers has not been researched yet, the Église Gnostique’s attempt to diminish its significance has been in vain: Bricaud’s

⁴⁶ Winterberg: Remembering, 52.

⁴⁷ Winterberg, Alberto Alfredo: The Reception and Reimagination of Ancient Gnosticism within the Église Gnostique de France: Simon Magus, a Case Study (to be published).

⁴⁸ Dillon, Matthew: The Heretical Revival: The Nag Hammadi Library in American Religion and Culture, Dissertation: Rice University, 67.

⁴⁹ Pearson: Wicca, 46.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Introvigne: Il ritorno, 128 f.

new church would increase its influence by the help of Gérard Encausse (1865–1916), better known by his pen name *Papus*. The latter declared the EGU to be the official church of the Martinist Order in 1911.⁵² What is more, the EGU became also largely affiliated with the Rite of Memphis-Misraim of Freemasonry, which transformed dedicated a degree within its initiatory course to a gnostic episcopal consecration.⁵³ In other words, the EGC would significantly supersede the subcultural influence first exercised by the original EG.

Bricaud's church would introduce reimagined versions of Catholic liturgies. What is more, he introduced a sacramental system based on Apostolic Succession, which he would claim to be valid also in the eyes of Catholic orthodoxy. By subscribing to the model of validity, he would ironically adhere to, confirm, and reintroduce official Roman Catholic ecclesiology. A church conveying a hybrid of Catholic ecclesiology, ancient theologoumena which were esteemed as heterodox by the institutional Catholic Church, and modern esotericism was born.

Now, in which precise sense did Bricaud adhere to Catholic ecclesiology by virtue of Apostolic Succession?

The claim to Apostolic Succession is not a uniform phenomenon within the various Christian denominations, but, for example, within Eastern Orthodoxy it is an ongoing matter of discussion. The traditional Eastern Orthodox viewpoint regarded the validity of the Apostolic Succession as intrinsically linked to their churches: no valid sacrament outside of the church.⁵⁴ The Catholic Church, however, adapted the views elaborated by Augustine of Hippo in his writings against Donatism: The fundamental question for Augustine was whether a sinful or heretical minister can still validly confer the sacraments. The answer for Augustine was yes: hence, even a bishop who apostatized could validly (but illicitly) ordain bishops, due to the indelible character of Holy Orders – a view that became fully accepted by course of the twelfth and thirteen centuries in the Western Church.⁵⁵

Jules Doinel created his own institutionalized priesthood, which derived its authority from the former's mystical experiences and visions. As such, it was dependent on the belief or disbelief in Doinel's claim to have been spiritually consecrated by the *aeon* Jesus. Bricaud, however, aimed at a claim to legitimacy which could be evaluated externally: As late as 1911, Bricaud received episcopal consecration through the hands of the lapsed Trappist and Gallican Louis-

52 Ibid., 133.

53 Ibid., 134.

54 Hall, Noel: Apostolic Succession, in: *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 11/1958, 113–133.

55 Cowdrey, H. E. J.: The Dissemination of St. Augustine's doctrine of Holy Orders during the later Patristic Age, in: *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 20/1969, 448–481.

François Giraud (1876–1950).⁵⁶ Still, it is doubted among scholars whether this ordination could be classified as valid from the Roman Catholic perspective: Introvigne and Łagósz call it an apparently valid or authentic consecration, whereas König casts doubt on it.⁵⁷ König points out that consecrations of Giraud's consecrator were rejected by several orthodoxies at his time: by the Indian Jacobites, the Syrian-Antiochian Church, as well as by the Roman Catholic Church.⁵⁸ Irrespective of these views, the act of consecration remains as a matter of fact for Bricaud's personal strategy of legitimacy. It is by introducing the Apostolic Succession within his clerical creation – completely disentangled from the theological views of Bricaud's consecrator and the latter's forerunners – that he adopts the distinctively western model of Augustine, and thereby traditional Catholic ecclesiology.

5 Memory and Authority of Early Christianity within the French Gnostic Catholic Church

Keeping in mind the notions of mnemohistory, archaeology, and intertextuality introduced in chapter 2, let us proceed to the analysis of the reception of Early Christianity within the *Église Gnostique Catholique/Universelle*. For this we shall consider the official creed, which was first published by Jean Bricaud in the *Catéchisme Gnostique à l'usage des fidèles de l'Église Catholique Gnostique* in 1907, published the Neo-Gnostics' own publishing house *Edition du Réveil Gnostique*, which published the official organ of this church, under the same name *Réveil Gnostique*. The catechism aimed at systematizing the teaching of Bricaud's church in 16 sections within 46 pages, addressing domains such as gnoseology, cosmology, anthropology, ecclesiology, Christology, redemption, and prayer. Before beginning the actual catechism in the form of question and answer, the publication entails a morning prayer, the creed, and an evening prayer. The creed, in the catechism rendered as *Symbole de l'Église Gnostique*, reads thus:

1. Je crois en un seul Dieu, Propator éternel et père tout puissant, susciteur et attracteur de tous les êtres visibles et invisibles, premier tridyname parmi les divins Eons.

⁵⁶ Introvigne: *Il ritorno*, 134.

⁵⁷ Cf. Introvigne, *Il ritorno*, 134. Łagósz, Zbigniew: *Mariavites and the Occult: A Search for the Truth*, in: *Anthropos*, 108/2013, 264. König, Peter-Robert: *Der O.T.O. Phänomen REMIX*, München: Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Religions- und Weltanschauungsfragen 2001, 427.

⁵⁸ König: *O.T.O.*, 427.

2. Et en son fils unique, logos divin, prototype de l'homme, second tridynome, Christ, lumière spirituelle et physique, issue du trésor de la lumière, vrai Dieu comme le père et consubstantiel à lui, sans qui aucune chose n'a été faite.
 3. Qui s'est incarné sur la terre en la personne de Jésus le sauveur et l'étoile du Plérôme, descendu ici bas pour nous, en y prenant une âme et uns corps semblables aux nôtres dans le sein de la bienheureuse Marie.
 4. Qui s'est manifesté en Jésus depuis le moment de son baptême jusqu'au moment de sa passion ;
 5. Qui nous a parlé par sa bouche et nous a enseigné la très sainte gnose et la vie sainte afin de nous délivrer de l'esclavage du Démiurge et de son Archon terrestre, et ainsi de permettre notre retour dans le Plérôme spirituel notre patrie, comme lui-même y est retourné après sa mort ;
 6. Qui viendra de nouveau plein de gloire sur la terre pour juger les vivants et les morts ; Dont le règne n'aura pas de fin.
 7. Je crois au Saint-Esprit, troisième tridynome, qui procède du père parallèlement au fils ;
Qui donne l'amour avec la vie ; qui nous met sur la voie de la vérité et de la sainteté, qui unifie tous les êtres, qui est adoré et glorifié avec le père et le fils.
 8. Je crois en une Eglise vraiment universelle ou catholique, dont l'origine sur la terre remonte à celle du genre humain, mais qui dans le ciel constitue le saint Plérôme, et est aussi ancienne que Dieu lui-même, l'Etre parfait.
 9. Je confesse les deux baptêmes et les trois autres mystères pour la rémission des péchés.
 10. Et j'attends, à l'achèvement du Plérôme terrestre, la réapparition des morts, l'ascension du Plérôme, enfin la destruction définitive des esprits réfractaires à toute conversion, en même temps que la destruction du monde hylique, œuvre du Démiurge.
- Amen.⁵⁹

Initially let us consider its intertextual aspect. It is obvious that the creed reads as a palimpsest of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, formulated at the Council of Constantinople in 381. The latter already has been an expansion of the original Nicene Creed articulated in 325 by the Council of Nicaea, including the controversial *filioque* article.⁶⁰ Following Genette's vocabulary introduced in section 2 of this paper, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed becomes the hypotext to Bricaud's creed, the hypertext. This identification can be affirmed by Bricaud's poetic rephrasing of the *filioque*-article in section 7 of the creed, "qui procède du père parallèlement au fils." Its structure follows the Nicene-Constantinopolitan

⁵⁹ The subdivision in ten sections has been emended by me. Bricaud, Johannès: *Catéchisme gnostique à l'usage des fidèles de L'Église Catholique Gnostique*, Lyon: Edition du Réveil Gnostique 1907.

⁶⁰ Cross, Frank Leslie / Livingstone, Elizabeth A.: Nicene Creed, in: The Oxford dictionary of the Christian Church; <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192802903.001.0001/acref-9780192802903-e-4797> (28.03.2022).

Creed but adds terms both drawn from the Church Fathers' heresiological reports and Coptic sources alike.

As is visible in section 1, Jean Bricaud retroactively identifies the first member of the Holy Trinity, God the Father, with a mythological being, the Propator (*προπάτωρ*, ancestor). This being derives from a mythological system which has been elaborated by or attributed unto the influential early church teacher Valentinus, who was deemed a heretic by the Church Fathers. E.g., the Propator has been mentioned by the Church Father Irenaeus of Lyon in the first chapter of his *Against Heresies*. Therein Irenaeus recounts how Ptolemy – a disciple of Valentinus – identifies the Propator with the Father of All: invisible, unnamable, eternal. This being is described as an *aeon*, a class of benevolent celestial beings or emanations of God prominent in Valentinian theology.⁶¹ Similarly, in section 3, 5, 8, and 9, Bricaud refers to the concept of *pleroma* (*πλήρωμα*, fullness), which was the primeval transcendent realm in which the *aeons* dwelt according to Valentinus.⁶² This is contrasted by the figure of the demiurge and his archons (sg. *ἄρχων*, pl. *ἄρχοντες*; chiefs, magistrates, rulers), the ruler of this world and his evil angels.⁶³ Some early Christians who were later deemed heretics by the proto-Orthodox Church promoted the opposition between a good, yet entirely transcendent God, and a lesser ignorant or even malevolent creator deity – the *demiourgos* (*δημιουργός*, craftsman). Whereas the transcendent God, who dwells in the pleromatic realm, would rule the spiritual world with the benevolent transcendental aeons, the demiurge would rule the created world – a degenerated imitation of the spiritual world – with the help of his archons. Mythological accounts vary, yet the birth of the demiurge and the creation of the material world could in some versions be considered a great cosmic tragedy, as in the case of Valentinianism.⁶⁴ Traditionally, this dualism has been attributed unto Gnosticism. Yet, it is also featured in the teaching of Marcion, who doubted that the jealous God of the Old Testament, and the loving Father of Jesus could be one and the same.⁶⁵ Bricaud adheres to this same view of an opposition between a benevolent transcendent God and a lesser malevolent creator deity in this section. As for the current state of the art in early Christian studies, this dualism can be considered a

⁶¹ Irenaeus, Haer. 1,1. Cf. King, Karen L.: *What is Gnosticism?*, Cambridge, MA/London, England: Belknap Press 2003, 155.

⁶² Rudolph, Kurt: *Gnosis. The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco 1987, 320.

⁶³ Ibid., 67–68.

⁶⁴ Einar Thomassen is providing a thorough analysis of the variants of the Sophia myth. Cf. Thomassen, Einar: *The Spiritual Seed. The Church of the Valentinians*, Leiden: Brill 2005, 248 ff.

⁶⁵ King: *Gnosticism* 45.

rather stereotypical feature of how various early Christian groups were described and deemed heretical by the heresiologists. Rather, current research points out that cosmological dualism can also be entirely absent from so-called gnostic texts.⁶⁶

Whereas the sources to the theologoumena mentioned above have been available to Bricaud through the Greek sources of the Church Fathers, he further refers to the *treasury of light* in section 2. This concept appears in the exceedingly complex cosmological systems of the Coptic *Pistis Sophia* and *Books of Jeû*, and roughly describes a heavenly region from which benevolent transcendental beings emerge.⁶⁷

Interestingly, the sections 3 and 4 are formulated in a rather ambivalent way. Stereotypical ideas of Gnosticism associate it with Docetism, a teaching that radically denied the humanity of Christ: Therein the Christ, as an entirely transcendent and divine being, only appeared (*δοκεῖν*) in human form. Some Docetists held the belief that the earthly man Jesus was possessed by the transcendental Christ at his baptism in the Jordan and abandoned by the same at his crucifixion.⁶⁸ Bricaud, however, describes the Christ as originating from the *pleroma*, yet as actually incarnating within the womb of Mary in the person Jesus, with the *semblance* of a human soul and body. Section 4 highlights that just by Jesus' baptism, the Christ also started his mission which was not salvation through his crucifixion, but the teaching of salvific knowledge, *gnosis*, as declared in section 5.

Rather curious appears the use of the term *tridyname* in relationship to God the Father (or Propator), God the Son Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit. Obviously, it intersects with the members of the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as present within Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The quest for the dogmatic resolution of the Holy Trinity was inaugurated by those early Christian authors who would shape what would become known as Christian Orthodoxy. Their aim consisted in elaborating both the relationship between the humanity and divinity of Jesus, as well as the relationship between the three divine persons Father, Son, and Holy Spirit with one another. As for the first question, the domain of Christology, the majoritarian Imperial Church (*Reichskirche*) would state that Christ Jesus possessed both a divine and a human nature, a teaching called *Dyophysitism*.⁶⁹ However, various mi-

66 Ibid., 8.

67 E.g., MacDermot / Schmidt: *Pistis Sophia*, 5.

68 Ehrman, Bart D.: *Lost Christianities. The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths we never knew*, Oxford et al.: Oxford University Press 2005, 16.

69 Cf. van Loon, Hans: *The Dyophysite Christology of Cyril of Alexandria*, Leiden/Boston: Brill 2009 and Khaled, Anatolios: *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic 2011.

noritarian Christian groups in late antiquity claimed various things: For example, the Theodotians and Ebionites acknowledged Christ's humanity, but not his divinity. The Marcionites, on the other hand, would reject Christ's humanity, and define him as entirely divine. This latter stance was defended by most of those groups which were later defined as gnostic.⁷⁰ As for the Trinitarian resolution, it was Tertullian in the west who first used Latin *trinitas*, describing God as "three in degree, not condition; in form, not substance; in aspect, not power," thereby characterizing how Father, Son, and Holy Spirit would relate one to another.⁷¹ Yet, Bricaud uses the Greek-derived term *tridyname*, triple-power. In the light of Trinitarian theology this term seems to be at odds with Tertullian's very definition "three in (. . .) aspect, not power," quoted above. Rather, it seems reasonable to trace Bricaud's use of this term to the shared gnostic cosmos of the Coptic books *Pistis Sophia* and the *Books of Jeu*. Within both texts we can find a class of celestial beings called the triple-powered ones (Ν̄ τριάγναμος), even though they neither pertain to the highest class of gods, nor are they entirely good in the moral sense.⁷² Yet, they are repetitively mentioned within both addressed Coptic Gnostic works. Due to their exceedingly complex nature, Bricaud may have been unaware of the relatively low celestial status of the triple-powered ones and may simply have been searching for a term that sounded more "gnostic" than *trinitas*.

Whereas the *archaeological* work of tracing the genesis of Bricaud's creed could go on and on, we shall rather leave it by these examples. Now, how can we evaluate this creed with respect to our theoretical framework?

As has been pointed out at the beginning of this section, Bricaud's creed largely reproduces the structure of the hypotext of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed yet refills it with concepts foreign to Christian orthodoxy. As "hypotexts can go through processes of extension, contamination and expansion",⁷³ we can see how that what formally resembles the Creed of the Roman Catholic Church amplifies the latter with a variety of concepts drawn from the Patristic heresiological and Coptic Gnostic sources alike. Hence, we find a *transmotivation*: a transformation of motivation occurred within the hypertext that has been lacking in the hypotext of the late antique creed.⁷⁴ The late antique creed of the Roman Catholic Church can still be recognized as a template, yet the theologoumena

⁷⁰ Ehrman: Christianities, 156.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Erin Evans discusses the complexities of the triple-powered ones extensively in his book. E.g., Evans, Erin: The Books of Jeu and the Pistis Sophia as Handbooks to Eternity. Exploring the Gnostic Mysteries of the Ineffable, Leiden/Boston: Brill 2015, 99.

⁷³ Allen, Graham: Intertextuality, London/New York: Routledge 2011, 106.

⁷⁴ Genette: Palimpsests, 330 ff.

therein refer primarily to Valentinian mythology which is at odds with Christian orthodoxy. What is more, early scholarship surrounding *Pistis Sophia* referred to it as a Valentinian text.⁷⁵ Thereby we can assume that Bricaud tried to create coherency with the late antique sources which were available at his time. Now, how can we evaluate the mnemohistorical aspect of Bricaud's work?

Mnemohistory, as Assmann points out, focuses on a recourse to a past which appears only in the light of later readings.⁷⁶ This is exactly the case in the context of the Église Gnostique Catholique. Roman Catholicism lies at the heart of Jean Bricaud's cultural matrix. Thereby the recourse to early Christian theologoumena cannot occur from a blank space. The various ancient groups which have been described as gnostic throughout the history of scholarship have never been a unified "gnostic church": on the contrary, it is a matter of debate among scholars whether "Gnosticism" can still be viewed as a useful analytical term for the great variety of heterodox early Christian groups, which oftentimes featured mutually exclusive theological concepts.⁷⁷ It is solely in the light of Catholic orthodoxy that Bricaud could conceptualize a Gnostic Catholicism with a binding creed. Hence, Jean Bricaud's Gnostic Catholicism retroactively projects the structures of Roman Catholicism onto those late ancient contents which were rejected by the proto-Orthodox Church. These contents, however, were primarily mediated through the authoritative reports of the Church Fathers which were, apart from the Coptic *Pistis Sophia*, the only accessible sources of so-called gnostic late ancient religious groups available at Bricaud's lifetime. Hence, once more, "the past is modeled, invented, reinvented, and reconstructed by the present."⁷⁸ With the unfolding of a Catholic subculture which disentangled itself from Rome, longing to return to an imagined primeval Christianity, as has been pointed out in chapter 3, Gnosticism becomes an ideal means of projection: The very act of remembering "the Gnostics" is an active choice. The heresiological reports have been available for more than a millennium before the emergence of Neo-Gnosticism. They have been a fundamental part within the cultural memory of Eastern and Western Christianity alike. Yet, it is solely within the wider context of the countercultural modern longing for an idealized early Christianity that a person like Jean Bricaud tries to reformulate Catholicism by the means of sources which were condemned as heretical by institutional Catholicism. What is more, the integration of Apostolic Suc-

75 E.g., Amélineau, Émile: *Essai sur le gnosticisme égyptien. Ses développements et son origine égyptienne*, Paris: E. Leroux 1887.

76 Assmann: Moses, 9.

77 Cf. Williams, Michael Allen: *Rethinking Gnosticism. An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 1996.

78 Assmann: Moses, 9.

cession within the Gnostic Catholic Church has a consolidating function towards the theological claim to authority: it is imagined as linking the church directly with ancient times, and as a provider of legitimacy in front of the original and rivalling *Église Gnostique* founded by Jules Doinel, which misses this criterion of sacramental validity. Hence, the memory of “the Gnostics,” in combination with Catholic ecclesiology, becomes the ultimate provider of legitimacy both within the esoteric subculture, and without, in the light of the institution of the Roman Catholic Church.

Concludingly it can be stated, that the *Église Gnostique Catholique* is but one example of an understudied field of the various churches independent from Rome, which claimed to present a variant of Catholicism, and which emerged in the aftermath of the French Revolution. The application of mnemohistorical and intertextual theory, which considers the remembered object – in this case late ancient Christianity – and the study of the conditions under which it is actively remembered alike, may serve as a useful approach to investigate further Catholic esotericisms and their construction of authority and memory. The academic study of churches such as the *Église Gnostique Catholique* and the genesis of their *theologoumena* and employed strategies of legitimacy, shows how blurry the line between esoteric subculture and institutional and textual Catholic tradition can be. Once more, it is important to point out how Jean Bricaud disentangled his own work from his predecessor Jules Doinel and the *Église Gnostique*. Doinel and his church rejected Catholicism altogether and recurred to Valentinianism and the Cathars. The *Église Gnostique*’s claim to authority were based on visions and mediumistic experiences, which could neither be validated nor invalidated from outside, and had no relevance whatsoever from an ecumenical perspective. Contrary to that, Bricaud recurred to Apostolic Succession, which provides an institutionalized mnemonic framework of legitimacy, linking his EGC with the tradition of the Catholic, Eastern, and Oriental Orthodox Churches. The recourse to the Creed of Nicaea and Constantinople as a provider of a framework for a modified neognostic creed, marks an important approximation to Roman Catholicism, as well. By virtue of these connections, the EGC did not only distinguish itself from its rivalling *Église Gnostique*. Rather, it participated in the discursive field of French ecclesiastical history, as the episcopal consecration of Doinel by the Gallican Louis-François Giraud marks.

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