



On September 19th 1914, the cathedral of Reims, later called “the martyr cathedral” was in flames as a result of the shelling of German artillery, at the time of the first equinox of world war I. In what was to become his second article as a journalist, Albert Londres, who was then a war correspondent, related the catastrophe in these terms:

*Now it is nothing but an open wound, the roof is destroyed,
Melted lead is pouring out of the mouths of the gargoyles*

On April 15th 2019 we all witnessed the live spectacle of the melted lead pouring out of the mouths of the gargoyles during the blaze at Notre Dame cathedral and we made the same observation:

Now it is nothing but an open wound, the roof is destroyed.

At the close of that 15th April, we could not help but think of all the operative freemasons who took 107 years to complete the building of that cathedral, a major site of History, that of France but that of the world as well, that of all men, Christians or non-Christians, believers or non-believers.

We half believed that through those flames we could see those freemasons, the bearers of the Faith, the Hope and the Charity of their time.

Through those flames, we saw our Brethren while stone over stone, each stamped with their marks, they were erecting those immense and unspeakably magnificent architectures.

Through those flames, we could read the prophetic pages of Victor Hugo's Notre Dame de Paris, writhing and giving substance to our anguish and fear of watching it collapse and be consumed.

With heavy hearts, at each and every moment, we feared that it might disappear, for we are imbued with that evidence which Paul Valéry imparted to us in the opening words of his article of August 1st 1919, *The crisis of the mind*: “We modern civilizations have learned to recognize that we are mortal like the others.”

As much as by their physical vanishing, that death of civilisations is sealed by the hermeneutic disappearance of the monuments they erected. Further on, he added:

“Everything has not been lost, but everything has sensed that it might perish.”

Just like the fire at the Reims cathedral, one century ago, the fire at Notre Dame de Paris has created a national and international momentum of financial help and material assistance as well as a debate, also national and international, as to the nature of the reconstruction. We can see the media taking up, as expected, the eternal quarrel between Ancients and Moderns.

Whatever choice is made, the burnt oak timbers are lost forever, and even if they are replaced by other oak beams, such replacement will only nourish the philosophical thought represented by Theseus' ship.

When we look at Notre Dame cathedral, vitally affected in its structure, we cannot but place it between the Abbey of Saint Denis and the Reims cathedral, whose triangulation built up the French national legend from which we came, and we turn, again and again, to our rituals in their progressivity and their contents.

Those three temples are perfect allegories of the Temple of Solomon, of which they are so many variations. Saint Denis, Reims yesterday, Notre Dame today make us experience, here and now, the ternary process of the Construction-Destruction-Reconstruction of the temple, from Solomon's Temple to Cyrus' Temple, from our inner temple to the temple of Humanity, a ternary structure which symbolises that spirituality in action which is its very essence.