

ROSICRUCIAN SOCIETY ESSAY

MEANINGS OF THE ROSE CROIX TRADITION

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Rose Croix, also called Rose Cross or The Rosy Cross, is an Order whose symbol is a red cross with a white rose at its center. Its founder was the semi-mythical Christian Rosenkreuz, who was a Kabbalist and alchemist and founder of the Rosicrucian Order. This symbol exemplified the teachings of a tradition formed within the Christian tenets and represented by the following quote which defined itself:

“What think you loving people, and how seem you affected, seeing that you now understand and know, that we acknowledge ourselves truly and sincerely to profess Christ, condemn the Pope, addict ourselves to the true Philosophy, lead a Christian life , and daily call, entreat and invite many more unto our Fraternity, unto whom the same Light of God likewise appeareth?”¹

However, the symbol had several meanings depending on the source. From a non-sectarian or non-religious viewpoint, represented by a group such as the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, it was said that the rosy cross predated Christianity and that the cross represented the human body and the rose represented man’s unfolding consciousness.²

The Rosicrucian Fellowship and similar rosicrucianists holding an esoteric Christian viewpoint maintained that the Rosicrucian Brotherhood was founded in the early 14th century.³ It began as an Invisible College of mystic sages, as previously mentioned, by a highly evolved entity with the symbolic name of Christian Rosenkreuz, with the mission of “preparing a new phase of the Christian religion to be used during the coming age now at hand, for as the world and man evolve, so also must religion change.”⁴

We can define Rosicrucianism in a generic sense as the study or membership in a philosophical secret society founded in late medieval Germany by Christian Rosenkreuz. It holds a doctrine or theological belief based on “esoteric truths of the ancient past, concealed from the average man, providing insight into nature, the physical universe and the spiritual realm.”⁵

Paracelsus, known as the “Luther of Medicine”,⁶ described the mystic sages mentioned above as “persons who have been exalted to God, and who have remained in

that state of exaltation, and have not died—nobody know what became of them, and yet they remained on earth.”⁷ Modern groups and researchers of the “Rosicrucian Enlightenment”⁸, which we will discuss shortly, date the Rosicrucian Order to the early 17th century through the Rosicrucian Manifestos, and state that they have been active since the early Renaissance Period, not only as an Hermetic Order, but also through those geniuses of the western world, the Freemasons, in the literary, cultural, ethical, political, religious and scientific fields.⁹

Between 1607 and 1616, two anonymous manifestos were published, first in Germany and then later throughout Europe.¹⁰ These were *Fama Fraternitatis RC* (The Fame of the Brotherhood of RC) and *Confessio Fraternitatis* (The Confession of the Brotherhood of RC). These documents presented a most laudable order of mystic-philosopher-doctors who promoted a Universal Reformation of Mankind. This movement was christened by historian Dame Frances Yates as the “Rosicrucian Enlightenment.”¹¹

Rosicrucianism was associated with Protestantism, particularly Lutheranism, and opposed Catholicism because of its preference for dogma over empiricism.¹² Rosicrucianism left its mark on early seventeenth century occult philosophers such as Michael Maier, Robert Fludd and Thomas Vaughan, as well as numerous esoteric societies in later centuries.¹³ It was also influential to Freemasonry according to historian David Stevenson, as it was emerging in Scotland, which we will examine shortly.¹⁴

Origins:

The *Fama Fraternitatis* described the legend of a German doctor and mystic philosopher named “Frater C.R.C.” who was identified in the third manifesto as Christian Rosenkreutz or “Rose Cross.” He was born in 1378 and supposedly lived 106 years. He studied in the Middle East under various Sufi masters but was unable to impart the knowledge he had gained in Europe, keeping it secret for 120 years until the intellectual climate was suitable to receive it.¹⁵ Even though much of their science and philosophy can be traced to the Moors they rejected Muhammad. Gathering together a small circle of friends and disciples he founded the Rosicrucian Order around 1407. During his lifetime the Order consisted of eight men, each a doctor and a sworn bachelor. They treated the sick for free, maintained secrecy and replaced themselves before they died. Three such generations passed between 1500 and 1600, a time when scientific, philosophical and religious freedom had grown so that the public might now be ready to benefit from the Rosicrucian’s knowledge.¹⁶

Reception:

The manifestos were and are not taken literally but regarded as allegorical statements. They directly state, "We speak unto you by parables, but would willingly bring you to the right, simple, easy and ingenious exposition, understanding, declaration, and knowledge of all secrets." They were influenced by respected Hermetic philosophers Heinrich Khunrath and John Dee. Some say the writers were moral and religious reformers. They used the disciplines of chemistry (alchemy) and other sciences to publicize their beliefs.

The Rosicrucian Enlightenment:

In the early 17th century, the manifestos created excitement throughout Europe by declaring the existence of a secret brotherhood of alchemists and sages who would transform the arts, sciences, religion and political and intellectual landscape of Europe. At this time the continent was being ravaged by political and religious wars. Between 1614 and 1620 about 400 Rosicrucian related manuscripts were published. The peak was reached when two mysterious posters appeared on the walls of Paris in 1622. The first said, "We, the Deputies of the Higher College of the Rose-Croix, do make our stay, visibly and invisibly, in this city" and the second one ended with the words, "The thoughts attached to the real desire of the seeker will lead us to him and him to us."¹⁷

The publications inspired a variety of works by others, among them Michael Maier (1568-1622) of Germany, Robert Fludd (1574-1639) and Elias Ashmole (1617-1692) of England. Michael Maier was granted the title Count Palatine by Rudolph II, Emperor and King of Hungary and King of Bohemia. He was one of the most prominent defenders of Rosicrucianism, clearly giving details about the "Brothers of the Rose Cross" in his writings. He made the first statement that they exist to advance inspired arts and sciences, including alchemy. He and others including Heinrich Khunrath made it clear that the alchemy was a symbolic and spiritual one rather than an operative one. In both direct and veiled statements, these writings conveyed the nine stages of the "involutionary-evolutionary" transmutation of the threefold body of the human being, the threefold soul and the threefold spirit, among other esoteric knowledge related to the "Path of Initiation."

In a 1618 pamphlet, Henrichus Neuhusius wrote that the Rosicrucians left for the East because of the instability in Europe caused by the Thirty Years War. This was echoed

in 1710 by Sigmund Richter, founder of the secret society of the Golden and Rosy Cross. In the first half of the 20th century Rene Guenon, a researcher of the occult, also came to the same conclusion.¹⁸ It was during this fertile time that many Rosicrucian societies arose. They were based on the occult tradition and inspired by the mystery of this “College of Invisibles.” The literary works of the 16th and 17th century are full of passages containing references to the Rose Cross. An example by Henry Adamson in 1638 is particularly apt.

For what we do presage is not in grosse,
For we are brethren of the Rosie Crosse;
We have the Mason Word and second sight,
Things for to come we can foretell aright.

This order, consisting of the membership of astronomers, professors, mathematicians, and natural philosophers in 16th century Europe, such as Johannes Kepler, Georg Joachim Rheticus, John Dee and Tycho Brahe gave rise to the “Invisible College” and was a precursor to the Royal Society founded in 1660. It was constituted by such scientists who met to share and develop knowledge acquired by experimental investigation, among them Robert Boyle.

In the late 18th century, Karl von Eckartshausen, a German Christian mystic, described the true Adepts of the Rose Cross thusly: “These sages, whose number is small, are children of light, and are opposed to darkness. They dislike mystification and secrecy; they are open and frank, have nothing to do with secret societies and with external ceremonies. They possess a spiritual temple, in which God is presiding.”¹⁹ Max Heindel, a 20th century initiate, emphasized that the roots of the Brothers of the Rose Croix, which were immersed in the western mystery tradition, were almost impossible to be traced since “theirs is a work which aims to encourage the evolution of humanity, they have labored far back into antiquity—under one guise or another.”²⁰

Symbolism:

Some have suggested the rose is a symbol of silence while the cross represents “salvation, to which the Society of the Rose Cross devoted itself by teaching mankind the love of God and the beauty of brotherhood with all that they implied.”²¹ Others have described the Rosy Cross as a symbol of the human process of reproduction elevated to the spiritual: “The fundamental symbols of the Rosicrucians were the rose and the cross;

the rose female and the cross male, both universal phallic symbols. As generation is the key to material existence, it is natural that the Rosicrucians should adopt as its characteristic symbols those exemplifying the reproductive process. As regeneration is the key to spiritual existence, they therefore founded their symbolism upon the rose and the cross, which typify the redemption of man through the union of his lower temporal nature with his higher eternal nature.”²²

It has also been suggested it is a symbol of the Philosopher’s Stone, the ultimate product of the alchemist.²³ The philosopher’s stone is a legendary alchemical substance capable of turning base metals into silver or gold. It was also believed to be the elixir of life used for rejuvenation and possibly for attaining immortality. It was the central symbol of the mystical terminology of alchemy, symbolizing perfection, enlightenment and heavenly bliss. Efforts to discover the philosopher’s stone were known as the *Magnum Opus (Great Work)*.²⁴ Elias Ashmole claimed its history went back to Adam who acquired knowledge of the stone directly from God and passed it down through biblical patriarchs thus giving them their longevity. The legend of the stone was compared to the biblical history of King Solomon’s Temple and the rejected cornerstone described in Psalm 118.²⁵

The history of the stone’s creation can be traced to Greek philosophy, and texts of Plato. According to Plato the four elements are derived from a common source called *prima materia* (first matter), which alchemists claimed was the starting material for the creation of the philosopher’s stone. The importance of this philosophical first matter persisted through the history of alchemy causing Thomas Vaughn to write in the seventeenth century, “the first matter of the stone is the very same with the first matter of all things.”²⁶

The philosopher’s stone has been attributed with many mystical and magical properties, the chief among them being transmutation. Alchemical authors, among them Michael Maier suggested that the stone’s descriptors were metaphorical. Esoteric hermetic alchemists made it clear that they “are not concerned with material substances but are employing the language of exoteric alchemy for the sole purpose of expressing theological, philosophical, or mystical beliefs and aspirations.”²⁷

Freemasonry and the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn:

The Rosy Cross is also a symbol in some Masonic Christian bodies and employed by groups studying Rosicrucianism. Within the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite

concordant body of Freemasonry, the Eighteenth Degree is specifically concerned with the rose cross and confers the title of “Knight Rose Croix.” Albert Pike wrote in the lecture of this degree in 1871:

“The Degree of Rose Croix teaches three things: the unity, immutability and goodness of God; the immortality of the Soul; and the ultimate defeat and extinction of evil and wrong and sorrow, by a redeemer or Messiah, yet to come, if he has not already appeared. But the cross’s peculiar meaning in this Degree, is that given to it by the Ancient Egyptians. Thoth or Phtha is represented on the oldest monuments carrying in his hand the Crux Ansata, or Ankh, (a Tau cross with a ring or circle over it). It was the hieroglyphic for life, and with a triangle prefixed meant life-giving. To us therefore it is the symbol of Life—of that life that emanated from the Deity, and of that Eternal Life for which we all hope; through our faith in God’s infinite goodness. The Rose, was anciently sacred to Aurora and the Sun. It is a symbol of Dawn, of the resurrection of Light and the renewal of life, and therefore of the dawn of the first day, and more particularly of the resurrection: and the Cross and Rose together therefore hieroglyphically to be read, the Dawn of Eternal Life which all Nations have hoped for by the advent of a Redeemer.”²⁸

The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn made use of the rosy cross as well. The “Ritual of the Rose Cross,” was designed for spiritual protection and in preparation for meditation. The Golden Dawn’s rosy cross contained attributes for the elements, planets, zodiac, Hebrew alphabet, alchemical principles, the hexagram and pentagram, the sephiroth of the Tree of Life, and the formula of INRI. On the back side of the rosy cross is inscribed the motto of the Zealator Adeptus Minor at the bottom, “The master Jesus Christ, God and Man” between four Maltese crosses, and in the center, written in Latin, “Blessed be the Lord our God who hath given us the Symbol Signum.”

Rose Croix Degrees in Freemasonry:

Toward the end of the eighteenth century two Rosicrucian inspired Masonic rites emerged, the Rectified Scottish Rite, widespread in Central Europe and influenced by the “Golden and Rosy Cross”, and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, first practiced in France, in which the 18th degree is called Knight of the Rose Croix.²⁹ The change from operative to speculative Masonry occurred between the end of the 16th century and the beginning of the 18th century. Two of the earliest speculative Masons were Sir Robert

Moray and Elias Ashmole, and early 17th century Rosicrucianism had an effect on Anglo-Saxon Masonry.

The Order of the Golden and Rosy Cross had a long complicated history and by the late 18th century had infiltrated Masonry to the extent that many Freemasons became Rosicrucianists and Rosicrucianism had been established in many lodges. This order was basically clandestine and no further discussion will be given about it.

Around 1530, more than eighty years before the publication of the first manifesto, the association of the cross and rose already existed in Portugal in the Convent of the Order of Christ, home of the Knights Templar. At the same time a writing by Paracelsus called *Prognosticatio Eximii Doctoris Paracelsi (1530)* made reference to the image of a double cross over an open rose, proving the “Fraternity of the Rose Cross” existed far earlier than 1614.³⁰

Modern Groups:

Today there are three groups styling themselves Rosicrucians: Esoteric Christian Rosicrucian groups, which profess Christ, Masonic Rosicrucian groups such as Societas Rosicruciana, and initiatory groups such as the Golden Dawn and the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC). According to masonic writers the Order is expounded in the literary work which molded the subsequent spiritual views of western civilization, *The Divine Comedy*, by Dante Alighieri (ca. 1308-1321).³¹ Freemasonic Rosicrucian bodies providing preparation either through direct study and /or through the practice of a symbolic-initiatic journey include in the U.S. Societas Rosicruciana in Civitatibus Foederatis.

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