

THE ROSE CROIX 18° AND OUR MASONIC ROSICRUCIAN SOCIETY  
By Frater James Marples, VII°  
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The Rose Croix 18° and our Masonic Rosicrucian group (the Rose & Cross Society) are often confused. Too often, many people (including many Masons) have mistaken assumptions about similar terms used in our fraternal circles. In a Symbolic Lodge of Master Masons, we use the term "Worshipful Master" as a mark of honor and distinction. It is readily understood that we do not 'worship' the holder of that Office as we would 'worship' Almighty God. We give a presiding officer of an organization due respect and cordial esteem. However, that in no way resembles religious veneration. Polite civility exists to foster harmony among men in diverse human civilizations. Religious adoration is properly confined to the Deity alone.

When a person hears of the Society of the Rose and Cross (Rosicrucianism) --- it looks and sounds quite similar to the words "Rose Croix". Both of these Orders are found in Freemasonry. Both utilize similar symbolism. Yet, the two are drastically divergent. A third group found in The Royal Order of Scotland with the archaic spelling of Rose Croix of Harodim (Rose Croix of Heredom) is again similar...yet different.

The ancient Knights Templar were established around the year A.D. 1118. A few years afterward, they received official sanction and approval from the Pope. Their mission was to protect pilgrims en route to The Holy Land. After some years doing this task, it became necessary for a sub-group to be formed to handle special needs. According to the well-known Masonic historian Albert G. Mackey, 33° and a KT, the Knights of the Rose Croix were a select band of Knights Templar. They usually rode horseback in cavalry fashion transmitting messages and safeguarding the few items of worth a pilgrim might have, or guarding the food, clothing, armor and tithes which had been collected to financially re-supply the Crusaders' efforts. The Rose Croix were known as the Elite of the Elite.

Toward the latter years of Templar and Rose Croix involvement in the Crusades, they developed an impressive reputation for courage and honor. The symbol of the Rose Croix was derived from some Knights observing an old abandoned cross on a hillside (which, according to legend, had been the site of a Christian's persecution & crucifixion). The abandoned cross had shrubs growing beneath it. Such new life (meaning the rose) was a welcome sign of renewed life in a place that formerly marked death and misery. Sometimes, a rose bush would intertwine itself upon such a cross. The blossoming rose, with its roots being at the base of the cross was more than just symbolically inspiring --- it was looked upon as a means of recalling and reflecting upon Holy Scripture....and thereby scripturally uplifting.

In short: the intertwined rose stem wrapping around a cross is the true symbol of an ancient Knight of the Rose Croix. That symbol has been adopted exactly by the modern successors as 18° Masons in Chapters of Rose Croix of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite.

By contrast, when Father Christian Rosenkreutz founded his Society of the Rose and Cross, its symbol was a straight-stemmed rose, which was placed on a cross --- then, the two items were placed upon an open Holy Bible. Since Fr. Rosenkreutz was a Roman Catholic priest, who lived his faith his entire life, it is obvious that he intended his society to be a Catholic Order similar to the Franciscans, Benedictines, and Dominicans. Most likely, he wanted the Rosicrucian Society to be a society of mendicant friars. From the Middle Ages, there have been four main mendicant orders recognized by the Second Council of Lyons in 1274: --- the Order of Preachers, the Friars Minor, the Carmelites, and the Hermits of St. Augustine. The Franciscans had a sub-group, the Capuchins, who split-off in the year 1525. They were said to blend a mix of the 'mystical' and the 'practical' in their outlook. Interestingly, Fr. Christian Rosenkreutz (1378-1484) lived just prior to that period of branched or segmented reforms within the Church.



The definition of Rosicrucianism is sometimes said to include study of the doctrines and philosophy of Hermes Trismegistus (thrice-great Hermes). But that is only a partial and insufficient definition. Magic, astrology and alchemy are really too broad a category to be lumped together as a basis for scholarly study meant to improve minds and sometimes heal bodies. It should be noted that Fr. Christian Rosenkreutz wanted the Fratres (the members of his society) to cultivate, use and share knowledge for good purposes, and usually for the end result of HEALING. This isn't a secret-society at all. Too many offshoot groups call themselves 'Rosicrucian' by parroting numerical oddities, revealing rigged tarot cards for supposed predictions of fame or fortune, or feeble attempts to read palms of hands or the stars in the night skies to learn supposed destinies --for their own profit. If the focus of those attempts is human-based: using selfish means and arriving at selfish ends --- the whole thing is a sham, a fraud, and a fake.

By contrast, the real Rosicrucian is the Masonic Rosicrucian who knows that Destiny is dictated by Almighty God. Masonic Rosicrucians acknowledge the power, glory, supremacy and place of honor which is due Almighty God for being the Creator and Preserver of the Universe. Quite notably, on the crypt of Fr. Christian Rosenkreutz's tomb was the inscription: "Jesus mihi omnia, nequaquam vacuum, libertas evangelii, dei intacta gloria, legis jugum" (Jesus is everything to me, by no means a vacuum, the freedom of the gospel, the inviolate Glory of God, the yoke of the law). Only God is omnipotent and infinite.

Masonic Rosicrucians never lose their humility nor their humanity. We never place scholarship above reverent worship to Almighty God. Mankind's innovations, inventions, and skill is all God-given. Five hundred years ago, any thought of a man flying to distant places would have been looked upon as deluded thinking or the spells of witchcraft. One hundred years ago, if anyone said that man would someday look inside the human body (as we do now via CAT-scan x-rays and MRI-scans), it would have been looked upon as black magic. Now, such devices are everyday tools used by Medical Doctors. Mortal man's strides in all areas of knowledge, information, and innovation are still the result of God's Will.

As Masonic Rosicrucians, we never pose ideas merely for the sake of uttering mere words of conjecture. Such an attempt is like idle thoughts. Our endeavors are constructive endeavors which must have some basis eventually rooted in reality. Our ideas aren't based upon a meager club or "secret society" just to be cliquish, stylish or trendy. We do not act as snobs pretending to have a monopoly on information processing or evaluation. We believe that all men are created equal, but they may have unequal talents. In the HERMETICA, the Greek word 'vous' is sometimes used, "in the wider sense of signifying a faculty which all men possess, and by the possession of which they are distinguished from beasts; and sometimes in a narrower sense, to signify a higher faculty which is bestowed by God on a few among men, but is not possessed by the many." I view such things as God-given gifts. It might be easier to visualize it when one compares Knowledge as a God-given Talent. Perhaps 1 in 100 people can play the organ. If that person becomes a Church Organist, they are utilizing their God-given talents on behalf of their faith.

Nearly everyone who is familiar with Judeo-Christian Scripture is familiar with Adam's fall. After "the fall", mankind has had to carry the burden of original sin. Evil is often associated with a wicked and fiery hell. The four essential elements of nature: earth, air, fire, and water ---are sometimes confined to two subset groups. Earth is relatively passive and water is relatively active. This distinction is usually expressed by calling the earth 'female' and the water 'male.' I never gave it much thought; although, I had heard comments referring to "Mother Earth" or "Old Man Winter" (snow = water). Goodness points upward whereas evil points downward, etc., etc.

The Scottish Rite 18<sup>o</sup> ---- that of Knight Rose Croix, was originally conferred in Templar Encampments in England "since time immemorial." The degree was possessed by Stephen Morin



when he came to the West Indies in the late 1700s. It was duly registered in the summary of degrees which were conferred under the auspices of The Supreme Council 33<sup>o</sup>, Mother Jurisdiction of the U.S.A. upon its founding in 1801. The jewel is the crowned compasses (open to 60 degrees). The apron has two segments: One side is black (representing the darkness of an ignorant world) with the bright red passion cross. The other side of the apron is white, bordered in crimson -- representing the Chamber of Light. Its emblem of the intertwined Rose with the Cross in the center of the compasses. Resting on the bottom quadrant is a Pelican feeding her seven young hatchlings. At the base of the Rose-Cross or Rose-Croix is a sprig of Acacia which is just above the pelican's head. The pelican is a symbol of self-sacrifice, charity, and devotion. Written across the quadrant is the Sacred Word for the Degree. Sometimes it is written in cipher. Other times, the English translation is written. I have to say that I was pleased when I joined Royal Arch Masonry in the York Rite because it allowed me to read (and verify) what I had been taught in the Scottish Rite.

The Rose Croix Degree of the Scottish Rite is open to men of all religious faiths, yet it is decidedly Christian in nature since it illustrates illustrious precepts according to the virtuous teachings taught by the Saviour, Jesus Christ. To love one's neighbor as oneself; to honor The Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit; and to hold fast to a belief of Immortality of the soul are fundamental hallmarks of this Degree. Various skeptics and detractors of our fraternity incorrectly cite passages of the Ritual out-of-context. They jump to conclusions that in the Rose Croix Degree, a candidate is supposedly shown Christian symbols which have been modified or altered to insinuate that if a man does good deeds or fulfills his tasks that he can become a carbon-copy of Jesus Christ. That is a ridiculous and malicious accusation that is far from the truth. Jesus Christ is revered by all Christians...including those Masons who are Christians. Jesus taught us to abide by The Father's Commandments. Jesus also taught the famous parable of the Good Samaritan by saying "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself". That makes it clear that we are to love, respect and help our fellow man --- no matter if they share our beliefs or not. We must help not only our friends whom we associate with in our inner-circle, but also reach out to be polite, civil and charitable to strangers at a distance, too. If we don't set a good example, a stranger will never learn from us. We encounter many people at the local restaurant, gasoline station, Wal-Mart store or at the Post Office. No religious litmus-test is required for admittance to those places. Men can meet, shake hands, engage in friendly dialogue and part in friendship. Masonic Halls are places where good men can meet to cultivate honorable ideals and tenets. They are no substitute for Houses of Worship. Similarly, various symbols cherished by a Christian can be visible to non-Christians without any offense being taken, if there is no peer-pressure and no attempt to indoctrinate. Acceptance of any symbol, principle of ideal must be voluntary and come from the heart. According to Albert Mackey, a crucifix is an essential part of the "furniture" of a Rose Croix Chapter. Again, a Rose Croix Chapter is not a Church ...and never meant to be. The Rose Croix origin began in the Crusades whereby defense and protection of Christianity was the aim. By the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite admitting men of various religious faiths to partake of the degree --- it allows men to take the first steps of acquaintanceship and friendship in a fraternal setting. That is all that Masonry does. Any deeper application in a religious or spiritual context is respectfully deferred to clergy and the individual member makes an individual choice as to his religious preference or form of expression. Actual worship is done elsewhere. To clarify a point where non-Masons are often confused: prayers of invocation and benediction are given at public events. That is the case with Freemasonry: prayers of invocation and benediction are given as well as prayers for those in sickness or distressed, as well as for the families of deceased members. However, Masonry's fraternal bond never displaces the sacred sacramental bond of clergy.

With our Masonic Rosicrucian Society: our group is more scholarly in origin, but also intended to fortify our existing faith, while healing the body by boosting our spirits and/or soothing the wounds of the flesh. Our society does not seek to change anyone's religious foundation whatsoever. Those matters are the sole domain of clergy. We do not delve into black magic or the occult for



spurious purposes. Masonic Rosicrucians remain anchored by Christianity as a whole. Our group is a learning group. We look upon new scientific, educational, and philosophical developments with an eye toward on what can be done with this "new information" or "new knowledge" for the greater good of mankind. It is sometimes said that "laughter is the best medicine". Sometimes the body can do wondrous acts of healing IF the mind will permit it. We sometimes study writings deemed to be "ancient wisdom", but that will be utter gibberish if we do not strive for a proper mix of modern practices with ancient customs.

The Degree of Rose-Croix and our Masonic Rosicrucian Society are two positive elements in our world. They are similar, yet dissimilar. As I often tell people: A man may join Freemasonry. And, a person doesn't merely "join" the Society of the Rose & Cross. One "becomes" a Masonic Rosicrucian. To read, to study, to understand --- and to use that knowledge in a beneficial and worthy way is the chief aim of our Institution.

Sources / Recommended Readings:

HERMETICA --- The Ancient Greek and Latin Writings which contain Religious or Philosophical Teachings Ascribed to ERMES TRISMEGISTUS. Volume II: Notes on the Corpus Hermeticum. Edited & Translated by Walter Scott. Shambhala Publications Inc, Boston 1985, Vol. II, pages 50, 214.

Catholic Encyclopedia. Published by New Advent. Commentary on origins of mendicant friars.

Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Albert G. Mackey 33<sup>o</sup> and KT

Clausen's Commentaries on Morals and Dogma by Henry C. Clausen 33<sup>o</sup> and KT, published by The Supreme Council, 33<sup>o</sup>, Southern Jurisdiction USA.

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