

What is a Rosicrucian? Ideals & Definitions

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Although this may seem a simple question to us, it quickly becomes a complex one as you research into the subject. This paper will briefly review what has been written and said about Rosicrucians using examples from both their supporters and detractors. I will also provide a brief sketch of Rosicrucian history to set the scene. As we will see, the subject of what a Rosicrucian was and is, and what Rosicrucianism is as a philosophy can be answered many ways, but there does appear to be an over-arching theme in the groups and philosophies that use this name which I will look at.

As a starting point, I will give a brief history of how and where the term and idea of a Rosicrucian originated. As most of you know, the term Rosicrucian appeared at the beginning of the 17th century. Three manifestos were published in what is now Germany and Austria, starting in 1614. The three manifestos are known as the “Fama Fraternitatis” (the full title in English being - Discovery of the Fraternity of the Most Noble Order of the Rosy Cross), the “Confessio Fraternitatis” (The Confession of the Laudable Fraternity of the Most Honorable Order of the Rosy Cross, Written to All the Learned of Europe) and “The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz¹”. These detail the travels, philosophy and death of the legendary Christian Rosenkreutz and the discovery of his tomb. I will not go into too much detail here as they are amply covered in the works of Dame Frances Yates², Christopher McIntosh³ and the works of Tobias Churton, including

¹ The first two can be found as an Appendix to Frances Yates’ *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* and Johann Valentin Andrea’s *The Chemical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*, translated into English by Edward Foxcroft in 1690, Minerva Books, London (no pub. date)

² Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, Barnes & Noble 1996 reprint of the 1972 original

³ McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians, The History, Mythology and Rituals of an Occult Order*, Weiser books, 1997

his complete *The Invisibles, The True History of the Rosicrucians*⁴. In brief, they describe the travels of Christian Rosenkreutz (hereafter CR) as he seeks wisdom by travelling to the east. Originally in a monastery, he leaves with another brother he calls P.A.L. who dies in Cyprus. CR travels then travels to Damascus and being well received due to his talents in medicine, he is able to secure a visit the city of Damcar (thought to be a city in the Arabian Peninsula). He learns Arabic and is able to translate a book of wisdom known as M. He later travels through Egypt to Fez and then back into Europe, to the area of Germany, through Spain. He tries to convey the knowledge he has learned to the monks and teachers in Europe but they do not listen to him or take him seriously. He resolves to set up an invisible society and gives six rules that the members must follow:

“They must cure the sick gratis,
they should dress in the fashion of the place where they live,
they should meet once a year or write a note explaining their absence,
each should find a worthy successor,
the letters C.R. should be their mark and seal and the Fraternity should remain
secret for one hundred years”⁵.

These rules are also added to in the Chemical Wedding and further illustrate the growing Rosicrucian ideal:

“You my lords the Knights, shall swear that you shall at no time ascribe your
order neither unto any devil or spirit, but only to God your Creator, and his hand-maid
Nature.

⁴ Churton, Tobias, *The Invisibles, The True History of the Rosicrucians*, Lewis Masonic, 2009

⁵ Churton, Tobias *The Golden Builders*, Signal publishing, 2002, p.87

That you will abominate all whoredom, incontineny, uncleanness, and not defile
your order with such vices.

That you through your talents will be ready to assist all that are worthy, and have
need of them.

That you desire not to employ this honor to worldly pride and high authority.

That you shall not be willing to live longer than God will have you”.

CR then signs to these rules in the Chemical wedding with the saying *Summa Scientia nihil Scire* (the highest wisdom is to know nothing) and lists himself as an *Eques aurei Lapidis* (a knight of the golden stone)⁶. As can be seen, Andrea was quite clear as to how he thought true Christians should behave.

The manifestos also communicate the ideal that all Christians should be able to live together in peace without the need for a Pope and without being afraid to study natural science/science. The manifestos had come out in a time period in history where it was thought that a Golden Age could come about led by wise men, studied in Natural Science and the ideals of the Enlightenment and who would be able to bring peace and brotherhood to Europe. The previous century had seen the wars of the Reformation and the Counter-Reformation as well as witch-crazes and the actions of the Inquisition against those the Church deemed heretics (It was only 14 years previous to the manifestos that, in 1600, Giordano Bruno had been burnt at the stake for heresy at the Campo Del Fiore⁷). The new Protestantism was seen by some as a chance to truly move forward with the Enlightenment ideals, to create a culture where men of learning could arise and would be protected from the Inquisition and the Catholic Church. Some people looked back to the

⁶ Andrea, Chemical Wedding, Foxcroft translation, p. 78

⁷ For more on Bruno see Francis Yates' *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (University of Chicago Press, 1991 reprint of 1964 original) and Ingrid Rowland's *Giordano Bruno, Philosopher, Heretic*, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 2008

time of England under Elizabeth I as being a Golden Age of exploration and learning. The fame of Dr. John Dee was well-known as was his relationship to the Queen, as her advisor and astrologer. Dr. John Dee (whose effect on this time period cannot be underestimated, and is certainly worthy of further study) was also held in high regard by authors of the manifestos, such that his Hieroglyphic Monad was placed on the title page of the Chemical Wedding⁸, and the Confessio was released with a pamphlet based on Dee's Hieroglyphic Monad. Dee had combined the symbols for Mercury (an allusion to Hermes) and Aries to form a symbol which serves as a key to great knowledge⁹ (An interesting aside, for our use of Latin mottos, is that which Dee put on the front of his monad treatise: *Qui non intelligit, aut taceat, aut discat* – Who does not understand should either learn, or be silent).

There is in the manifestos a clear push toward Hermetic philosophy and the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus. This philosophy had been rediscovered in the Renaissance and publicized by the writings and translations of such men as Pico della Mirandola and Marcilio Ficino. Hermeticism was and is distinctly Gnostic and was seen, for the most part, as a heresy by the Church, but Hermeticism/Gnosticism put forward the idea that man could indeed become closer to and like God and that a pursuit of reason and the sciences was a valid way of investigating the world, seen and unseen¹⁰.

Current research has shown that the manifestos were the work of Johann Valentin Andrea. His life is detailed in both Yates and Churton's works, and in brief he was Lutheran and had graduated from the University of Tübingen. He is seen as someone who wanted to instill a sense of reform into the time he lived in and wanted to stimulate

⁸ Yates, p.39

⁹ Dr. John Dee, *The Hieroglyphic Monad*, Weiser Books.

¹⁰ For a more complete discussion of Hermeticism, see Churton's *The Golden Builders* and *The Gnostics* as well as Yates' *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* and *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*

discussion on learning and the place of religion and science in society. He appears to have authored all three manifestos, with the help and inspiration of some of his intellectual circle and earlier philosophical works. Later in life, he described them as a “ludibrium” often later translated as a joke or hoax. This is not what Andrea intended. If you read the manifestos, they are clearly not a joke and are quite clear in their message of reform (one can also see his later views as a way of self –preservation, noting that Tommaso Campanella, author of *The City of the Sun*, was forced to recant his work after being a guest of the inquisition for a number of years). One could regard them, if you want to keep with the idea of a ludibrium as, for example, in a Shakespearean comedy – yes, they are humorous, but they convey a deeper message. The manifestos, especially the Chemical Wedding, are full of alchemical imagery and focus on the idea of transforming your self and your soul¹¹. Andrea was reacting to the excitement and discussion the manifestos had stirred. Almost as soon as they were published, both supporters/apologists, such as Robert Fludd, and detractors appeared. They had also appeared at a politically sensitive time. The publication of the manifestos seemed to have been closely tied with the events surrounding of Frederick, Elector Palatine, and his wife Elizabeth Stuart (daughter of James I of England) and his acceptance to the throne of Bohemia. Frederick’s capital at Heidelberg was a center of learning and promoted freedom to investigate nature and science, somewhat similar to the previous of Rudolph II, Holy Roman Emperor (who had been favorable to the study of alchemy, for example). However the political and religious lines had been drawn and Frederick’s entry to Bohemia quickly instigated the Thirty Years War¹². This Protestant move to Bohemia

¹¹ Alchemy is a fascinating subject and relates closely to Rosicrucianism and its development and is worthy of further study.

¹² The events surrounding Frederick are well described in Yates’ *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*.

was crushed by the Catholic Church and the Hapsburgs of the Holy Roman Empire at the Battle of the White Mountain in 1620.

The Rosicrucian idea was also attacked in France, but appears to have found some refuge in England and in some of the Protestant states in Germany. It must be remembered at this point that there was no actual Rosicrucian society in existence. Many tried to apply in response to the manifestos but none received a reply, but the philosophy inspired by them had struck a chord and continued to grow in popularity. Andrea himself started a short-lived society and tried to further his ideal society in his book *Christianopolis*, which followed on from such works as Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* and Tommaso Campanella's *City of the Sun*.

One person we are familiar with in Freemasonry, Elias Ashmole, was clearly interested in and studied the Rosicrucian manifestos and may provide a connection of Rosicrucian ideals to early Freemasonry¹³. As an aside, during this period of the 17th century, early Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism were seen as being closely tied as in *The Muses Threnodie* poem by Henry Adamson in 1638, about Perth, Scotland:

“For what we do presage is not in grosse,
For we be brethren of the Rosie Crosse,
We have the Mason Word and second sight,
Things for to come, we can foretell aright”¹⁴

Although there has been much discussion on what the relationship here is exactly, both groups were thought of in the same light. It is also interesting to note that Freemasonry may also have been inspired by Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*, itself based

¹³ As noted in Tobias Churton's *The Golden Builders, The Magus of Freemasonry and his Freemasonry: The Reality*.

¹⁴ Quoted in Yates' *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, p.211

on the Rosicrucian ideas. An example of this can be seen in a series of toasts mentioned in a ritual exposure of 1777, we find the following:

“To the perpetual honor of Freemasons,
To the memory of him who planted the vine,
To the secret and the silent,
To him who did the temple rear,
To the memory of Vitruvius, Angelo, Wren and other notable artists,
To Salem’s Sons...”¹⁵

These appear to be references to Bacon’s Island of Bensalem (son of Salem) and to “him who planted the vine” to the wise men of the island. There appears to have been many influences on in Freemasonry and its’ early history and we are, unfortunately, much in need of the never completed work by Ashmole on the history of Freemasonry¹⁶.

This slight digression will go to some extent to show how Rosicrucian philosophy permeated thought in these times. It should also be noted that though this philosophy is Gnostic in ideal, Andrea and others at the time would not have agreed necessarily since the view of Gnosticism was still the one-sided heretical view of the Church. They would have agreed that they were seeking to return to the original Christianity and ideals of Christ where all men were equal and there were no sectarian differences and the world could be a brotherly utopia comparable to Bensalem or Christianopolis.

Having now given a somewhat brief and hopefully not too eclectic history, I will look at how Rosicrucians have come to be perceived and what they have been believed to

¹⁵ From Anonymous, *M******, or the Grand Lodge Door Open’d. Wherein is Discovered The Whole Secrets of Free-Masonry, Both Ancient and Modern, 1777, Kessinger reprint p.4

¹⁶ For some interesting research on this see Churton’s *The Golden Builders and Freemasonry: The Reality*, Lewis Masonic, 2007.

have been. The quotes that follow are from sources both negative and positive, and will give a small but, I think, representative sampling.

Albert Mackey quotes in his lexicon that they are “*a sect or cabal of hermetical philosophers – received by tradition from the Ancient Egyptians, the Chaldeans, the Magi and Gymnosophists...thus engaged in the wild studies of alchemy*”¹⁷. The Catholic Encyclopedia describes the term Rosicrucian as “*The original appellation of alleged members of the occult-cabalistic-theosophic Rosicrucian Brotherhood*” and later says “*As a result of his [Andrea’s] satirically meant but seriously accepted works, which soon gave rise to occult humbuggery (opposed by him) in new Rosicrucian raiment, Andrea openly renounced Rosicrucianism and frequently referred to it as a ridiculous comedy and folly.*”¹⁸ An objective reading of Churton and McIntosh clearly shows that this is not the case. These two quotes tend to summarize the views people have taken.

A more recent author has noted that “no single topic in the history of secret societies in the Western World is as rich with confusion, disinformation and wild inaccuracies as the origins and history of the Rosicrucian movement”¹⁹. This view comes through in a quote from H. Spencer Lewis, creator of AMORC (more on them later), who states that: “*there is but one land in which the Rosicrucian Order could have had its birth. That land is Egypt... one must reject the popular and entirely fictitious claim that the Rosicrucian Order had its origins in the 17th Century in Germany (p.16)...The statement...on the part of those unacquainted with Rosicrucian history that Andrea was the author of the books that established the first and only Rosicrucian Order...appears ridiculous. The real author of the pamphlets was none other than Sir Francis Bacon,*

¹⁷ Albert Mackey, *The Lexicon of Freemasonry*, Barnes & Noble reprint, p.414-416.

¹⁸ On-line Catholic Encyclopedia “Rosicrucians”, accessed 1/05/09, www.newadvent.org/cathen/13193b.htm

¹⁹ Greer, John Michael, *The Element Encyclopedia of Secret Societies*, Harper Element, 2008, p.434

*who was Emperor for the Order in England and various parts of Europe at the time (p.120-121)*²⁰. Little evidence is provided to back up these claims.

An extreme example of a negative view is quoted by Pat Robertson, who makes the pronouncement that “Like the Rosicrucians and the higher order of Masons, the Nazis practiced secret ceremonies that invoked the mystical powers and included the worship of Lucifer, their god of light”²¹. An example from the positive, if romantic, side comes from Charles William Heckethorne writing in 1897, who said that “*A halo of poetic splendor surrounds the order of the Rosicrucians, the magic lights of fancy play around their graceful dreams, which the mystery in which they shrouded themselves lends additional charm to their secrecy.....poetry and romance are deeply indebted to the Rosicrucians for many a fascinating creation.....the Rosicrucians spiritualized and refined it [alchemy] by giving the chimerical search after the philosopher’s stone a nobler name than the attainment of wealth, namely, the opening of the spiritual eyes.....to illumine his mind with true knowledge*”²².

Conspiracy theorists have also weighed in on what they believe the Rosicrucians to be. William Still notes that Francis Bacon was the head of both Rosicrucians and Freemasonry in his time and that, as well as being a bastard child of Elizabeth I, he was the guiding light that kept alive “*the secret doctrine of the ages...during the dark night of the Middle Ages*”²³. This plan was to set up America controlled by secret societies, obviously also including Freemasons. Another conspiracy writer, Michael Howard,

²⁰ Lewis, H. Spencer, *Rosicrucian Question & Answers, with a Complete History of the Rosicrucian Order*, Rosicrucian Press, San Jose, 1961 (7th edition)

²¹ Pat Robertson, *The New World Order*, Word Publishing, Dallas, 1991, p.170.

²² Charles William Heckethorn, *The Secret Societies of All Ages and Countries*, Vol. 1, University books, New York, 1965 (reprint from 1897), p.219.

²³ William T. Still, *New World Order: The Ancient Plan of Secret Societies*, Huntington House Press, Louisiana, 1990, p.46.

devotes a whole chapter to the Rosicrucians and describes a view that the society originated with the Egyptian Pharaoh Thutmose III and continued through the Essenes to Syriac Christians who were in contact with the Knights Templar. He also writes that Rosicrucians are connected to Sufism, particularly a group known as the Path of the Rose²⁴. Later, he looks at the connection to alchemy and notes, as other writers have, that the word Rosicrucian may be derived from *ros*, meaning dew, and *crux*, or cross, the alchemical symbol for light, thereby being connected to the idea of transforming matter into spirit²⁵.

There are some quite good definitions of Rosicrucianism that I came across, one from the OED that defines Rosicrucians as “*a member of a secret society devoted to the study of metaphysical, mystical and alchemical lore*”²⁶ and from Christopher McIntosh “*Reducing Rosicrucianism to its basic elements leaves little more than a name, a symbol, a legend, certain occult associations, and a Gnostic type of outlook*”²⁷. He also notes that there is some connection to Freemasonry and that Freemasonry is a similar society, but that further research is necessary. Another definition, though accepting the reality of a 17th century order, is also quite good: “*A secret society bearing the name became known in Europe at the beginning of the seventeenth century. Its object was the reformation of state, Church and individuals, and, the study of philosophy and science...Its ideas, like those of the Illuminati, were in advance of the age, and, however objectionable to such advocates of political and religious despotism as Robison, Barruel et al, are precisely the*

²⁴ There is no doubt some similarities in Sufi philosophy to European mysticism/esotericism and this would be another interesting avenue of research especially in light of comments made in the forward by Robert Graves for *The Sufis* by Idries Shah.

²⁵ Michael Howard, *The Occult Conspiracy: Secret Societies, Their Influence and power in World History*, Destiny books, Vermont, 1989, p.42-72.

²⁶ Concise Oxford English Dictionary, Revised 10th edition, Oxford Univ. Press, 2002.

²⁷ Christopher McIntosh, *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology and Rituals of an Esoteric Order*, Weiser Books, San Francisco, 1997, p.137.

*principles which we as a nation, have embodied in our constitution and laws, and of which we are justly proud*²⁸.

The impact of the Rosicrucian manifestos and the subsequent development of its philosophy and outlook cannot be underestimated. It played a part in the development of many societies from 18th century Rosicrucian groups to the Order of the Golden Dawn and to the various modern societies including our own, the Societas Rosicruciana in Civitatibus Foederatis, as well as AMORC (Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis) and the Fraternalis Rosae Crucis²⁹. As discussed earlier, the effect on Freemasonry also appears to have been clear, if not great. Tobias Churton in his research on Elias Ashmole seems to be certain that there is a connection between Rosicrucian philosophy and his, and others, involvement in 17th century Freemasonry. There appears to have been a definite, historical group of speculative Masons, known as Accepted Free Masons to which Ashmole was initiated into and that this group was “hijacked”, in the words of Churton³⁰ in 1717 by the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster (which eventually became the United Grand Lodge of England) and that the history of this early group was lost or deliberately ignored/destroyed as the Moderns Grand Lodge came into being and wanted to distance itself from any Stuart affiliations and to make it more acceptable to the Hanoverian rule – this again is an area of further, albeit controversial research³¹.

As I was trying to come up with a focus for the end of this somewhat eclectic paper, I was struck by two thoughts. One is that this is a very complex history and story

²⁸ Macoy, Robert, *A Dictionary of Freemasonry*, Grammercy Books, NY, 1989 (reprint of late 19th Century edition)

²⁹ These two societies are also worth further study as they are still around, AMORC being the largest, I believe, and also because of their contentious battle in the court system in the 1930s as to who were the real Rosicrucians – both had discounted the SRIA/SRICF as being a contender.

³⁰ Discussed in Churton’s *Freemasonry, The Reality*

³¹ Discussed in Tobias Churton’s *The Golden Builders*

that interweaves through centuries of history, and appears to be another example of how humanity and our culture continually appears to be striving for the same type of ideal (which one can argue Freemasonry is a part of), generally characterized by some authors as Gnostic, where all live in harmony with respect to each other and the environment and where the highest goal/aim is to become closer to God and to gain a better understanding of life, the Universe and everything (an interesting study of this idea, which some would consider on the fringe of history is the book *Talisman: Sacred Cities, Sacred Faith* by Graham Hancock and Robert Bauval³²). Secondly, what was it like to be around when the manifestos came out, and is there anything similar now that can be likened to that event where strong emotions were stirred up on both sides? From the previous quotes cited, the Rosicrucian manifestos and later associated writings were perceived as showing what society could be like, with a true accounting of history and philosophy, and that they were also perceived by their detractors as an attack on society, culture and religion. One can see similarities to this on a different level by the reception and aims of Dan Brown's books *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Lost Symbol* (also to a lesser extent the prequel and introduction to the character of Robert Langdon, *Angel and Demons*). To some, this may seem somewhat of a literary stretch – but bear with me. His books are fiction, as were the manifestos, but they present an alternative view of history as well as the recovery of ancient knowledge and philosophy. They use the medium of secret societies, such as the Priory of Sion and in the latest book Freemasons, who are the keepers of the knowledge and that are Gnostic in intent, and that have a certain place in history. *The Lost Symbol* furthers Brown's philosophical ideals and sets out a way for

³² Hancock, Graham & Bauval, Robert, *Talisman: Sacred Cities, Sacred Faith*, Penguin Books, London, 2004

people to understand and see their way closer to god, regardless of their own faith – all of which have value – and to connect these ideals through the studies of new sciences, in this case Noetics. The manifestos also became part of the impetus to study science more openly and honestly with for example, what would become the heliocentric nature of the solar system and Newtonian physics. Brown’s books also created a huge amount of discussion and reaction ranging from positive to indifferent to quite negative in the case of the Catholic Church – like the manifestos. One can also argue that the crux of Dan Brown’s philosophical ideas presented at the end of *The Lost Symbol* are somewhat similar to Rosicrucian/Gnostic thought.

This view has been shared by some authors of commentaries on *The Lost Symbol*, such as Simon Cox who says: “*However, it’s the deeper, more hidden elements of the book that I will believe have the most impact over time. Between the lines of the novel, Dan Brown has attempted to write something akin to a hidden Hermetic text. It’s a bold and ambitious undertaking and one that I applaud him for. Indeed, the last ten chapters of the book and the epilogue are more or less an extended treatise on Deism, Hermetic thought and religious toleration.*”³³

In highlighting this book, not only for the positive view of Masons it gives, but because it can also afford us a similar view (though thankfully without the violence etc) to those who saw the Rosicrucian manifestos, wanted to know more, and wanted to be a part of a society that promotes the betterment of humankind. An example of Brown’s philosophy is this quote on Masonry from his book (no plot spoilers here): “*The truth was that the brotherhood’s [Freemasons] focus on death was in fact a bold celebration of life. Masonic Ritual was designed to awaken the slumbering man inside, lifting him*

³³ Cox, Simon, *Decoding the Lost Symbol*, Touchstone Books, NY, 2009

from his dark coffin of ignorance, raising him into the light, giving him eyes to see. Only through the death experience could man fully understand his life experience. Only through the realization that his days on earth were finite could he grasp the importance of living those days with honor, integrity and service to his fellow man. Masonic initiations were startling because they were meant to be transformative. Masonic vows were unforgiving because they were meant to be reminders that man's honor and his "word" were all that he could take from this world. Masonic teachings were arcane because they were meant to be universal...taught through a common language of symbols and metaphors that transcended religions, cultures and races...creating a unified "world-wide consciousness" of brotherly love"³⁴. These ideals are known to us and are similar to those that have come before, as has been discussed in this paper, from Andrea and his literary alter ego Christian Rosenkreutz.

In conclusion, I hope this paper has been stimulating and has stimulated you to take a path of further study into to many subjects and philosophies touched on in this brief history and discussion. This study has been for me another path and doorway to learning as was the first time I went through the degrees, especially that of Fellow Craft where the study of the liberal arts and sciences was earnestly encouraged. There is so much information and philosophy involved in this subject, that this paper is for me is only a small unsteady first step on a journey to more light through knowledge. Further down this path are the studies of Alchemy, Hermeticism, Dr. John Dee, Elias Ashmole, Accepted Free Masons and the Rosicrucian Connection to Freemasonry³⁵.

³⁴ Dan Brown, *The Lost Symbol*, Doubleday, New York, 2009, p.437.

³⁵ It should be noted that there are two papers from *Ars Quator Coronati* that deal with this question – Vol. 7, *Rosicrucians, Their History and Aims* by Dr. Wynn Westcott, W.M., 1894 and Vol. 97, *Rosicrucianism and Its Effect on Craft Masonry* by Bro. A.C.F. Jackson, 1984.

Freemasonry has been for me a path of study and as such, I was humbled and honored to be invited join the Rosicrucians, where I had cause to expand my studies into the philosophical and esoteric sides of our Craft and I hope in the future to present further fruits of my labors to my brothers.