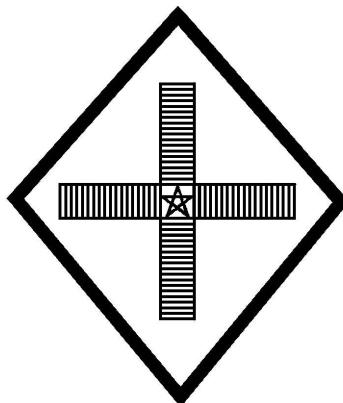


Societas Rosicruciana
In
Anglia



Notes for the Philosophus

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Opening

The opening of this Grade shows the Ancients seated as in the 1st Part of the Zelator Grade, though as with the Grade of Practicus, they have no active function to perform. The College is declared open with the minimum of ceremony and indeed in this Grade there is not even a prayer! The Cross which appears above the altar is a distinctive one and it is considered by many to be the correct form of the Rosicrucian Cross.

Reception

There is a short dialogue between the Celebrant and Exponent prior to the candidate's reception and it refers to the purpose of this Grade, which is the study of Religions and Philosophies around the world, present and past and hope is expressed that by such a study, the new Frater will "come to a greater appreciation of the beauties of the Christian faith". They also declare that our fraternity "confers upon its members not only knowledge, but also wisdom".

Knowledge and Wisdom

There is a striking claim made by the Celebrant and it is that colleges not only confer knowledge, but also wisdom, and that each Frater must decide for himself whether this claim is true or not. Certainly, we get some glimpses of the Wisdom of past ages when we undertake the study required of us in this Grade. Indeed, "the growth of ages has added to the store of learning" in our Society, and pearls of wisdom are conveyed to the candidate in each of the Grades. We are also reminded that the Wisdom of the Christian faith is the foundation stone of our Society, just as it was for our ancient brethren of the R.C,

The study of other religions and philosophies broadens and deepens our understanding of the mysteries of God, of Nature and of ourselves. Man has always been on a Quest; a search for a meaning and for a deeper knowledge of himself because as Carl Jung has written, the religious instinct in man is very strong and thus we find these common threads in the major religions of the world and the world's philosophies, which have been woven into the tapestry of beliefs and customs of all cultures.

The Cross

In each Grade of the 1st Order, the candidate is required to carry a particular Cross. In this Grade it is a white Calvary Cross of 12 squares, with the bottom square painted black. The significance of this design is made known to the new Philosophus.

The Pledge

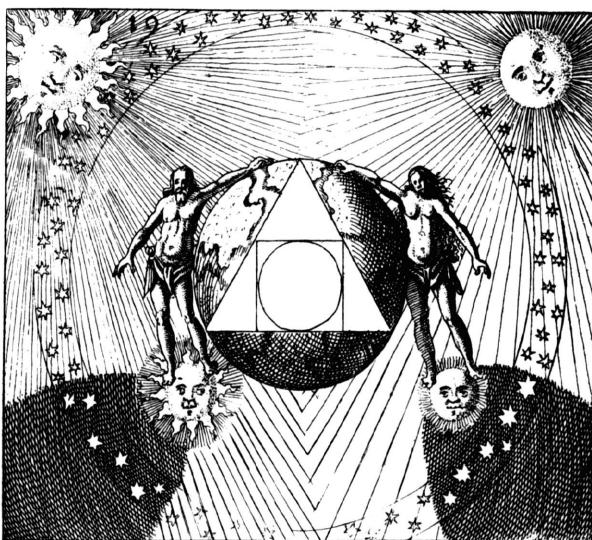
The candidate's pledge is to be virtuous at all times, to cultivate his higher self and to "commence the ascent of the Mount of Wisdom", The Mount of Wisdom is represented in alchemical drawings as a mountain with the aspirant ascending the seven steps of Wisdom. These represent the stages in the alchemical process or the initiation of the seven lower Sephiroth of the Tree of Life. It is a similar journey to the S.... S.... Of W.... that of the Zelator took in the 2nd part of his ceremony.

The ascent of the soul is represented figuratively in a similar manner in other branches of the Western Mystery Tradition, for example, it is the holy mountain upon which the communion with God is gained (in both the O.T and N.T.). Man's desire to ascend the holy mount or to withdraw into it and there dwell in the presence of the Most High, is a common theme in most of the religions of the world.

As a Freemason, the Philosophus has already taken this journey, physically and symbolically, many times - in the form of a ladder, a winding staircase, a mountain, or a pilgrimage along the road which ascends the mystical mount etc.

Lecture

The Knowledge Lecture in this Grade covers some 23 pages and it reviews, albeit in a brief manner, the Religions of the Near-East and Far-East; the Mythologies of the Mediterranean cultures and also the Ancient and Modern Philosophers. It is suggested that, as a start, the new Philosophus selects one from each of these groups for detailed study, using the recommended references and his own resources to extend his knowledge. It is to be hoped that one of these traditions is of a particular interest to a Frater, and that he might share his knowledge at with the rest of the Fratres.



The Relationship of Christianity

R.Wy.Fr. Rev. Peter Swindell

In the ritual of the fourth grade of our Society we are exhorted, while adhering firmly to the Christian faith, to study the world religions. One such way is usually called "Comparative religion" and this is an academic study. It looks at the different religions from the outside; makes comparisons of their belief and practice; and tries to understand them from the perspective of a friendly outsider. No-one would deny that this is of value because any effort to understand one another must be of benefit to the human race, and indeed be part of our Christian compassion.

However, in this article I would like to point the reader to a more exciting and risky enterprise and this is to attempt to gain an insider's view of another faith because religion can never be truly understood from the outside. It is as we practice a religion and engage as a practitioner with its belief-system that we begin to get some insight into the truth that it represents.

In what I say below I shall give particular examples from Buddhism, because that is the other religion with which I myself engage, but *mutatis mutandis* what I say applies to other religions as well.

One of the first questions you would be asked if you were known to be a Christian and that you also practiced another religion is, "How can you, as a Christian, get involved in this way?" If your questioner is aggressive enough, he might quote you the two following texts. The first is from John 14.6: "Jesus said I am the way, and the truth, and the life. None comes to the Father except through me"; and from Acts 4.12: "There is salvation in no one else (ie. other than Jesus), for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

There are currently three different Christian approaches to the question of the relationship between Christianity and other faiths, usually designated as the exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist positions.

The '**exclusivist**' position is the one that held sway until recent times. Christianity is the sole true faith, and all others are either frankly wrong, or at best are but distant pointers to the true faith. Indeed, salvation depends on being a Christian. This is a powerful motive for Christian mission among compassionate Christians. St Francis Xavier, the 16th century pioneer Jesuit missionary to India, rejoiced at the number of children he baptised, for in this way they were saved from a half-life in the limbo of the unbaptised in Hell. He spoke of how he wished to go through the universities of Europe almost compelling people to come out to evangelise the heathen rather than bury themselves in their ivory towers. The 'exclusivist' position was summed up for the 'man in the Street' in the musical setting of Kipling's poem *Mandalay*, with its lines:

Bloomin' idol made of wood

What they call the great god "Budd"

On the basis of the two texts quoted above, this is still the position of many Christians. However, it fails to meet the conviction of those Christians today who find aspects of ultimate truth in other faiths.

Secondly, there is the '**inclusivist**' position. This affirms the absolute truth of Christianity, and sees it as the supreme revelation. but it would also include the other religions, to a greater or lesser degree, within it. This is because the truth is to be found in all other religions, and Christ embraces all truth.

This is an attractive option. It enables those who hold it to maintain the traditional ultimate claims of Christianity and yet to accommodate the truth wherever they find it. However, it can appear to those who hold other faiths that Christians are, all too often, making a take-over bid. "We hold the true faith, but we can accommodate you within it." Sadly this does not respect the integrity of another religion.

The third position is the '**pluralist**'. This sees all religions as possessing the truth in various degrees and accommodates the many paths up the mountain, at the top of which you will find God, Allah or the Eternal. What matters is that you find the one that suits you, or if you hold this position, then you may find a convergence of paths as you ascend this mountain.

This has the advantage of taking other religions seriously on their own terms. But of course it completely ignores the unique claims of Christianity for Christ. It can also lead to people constructing their own religion, selecting what suits them from different traditions, which, as we shall see later, can block all spiritual progress.

I have adopted what could be called the modified inclusivist tradition. Whilst being convinced of the claims of Jesus Christ, I cannot deny the spiritual depth and truth I find in the Zen Buddhist communities of monks and laypeople, and in the teaching they provide. In fact I believe that Christ is at work there, and that his Spirit blows where it wills (cf John 3). It seems to me that Christ is often more clearly found there than in some Christian groups, which may gather 'in his name'.

On this basis, you may ask whether there is any place left for the Christian mission? Let me tell you a story. On one occasion I was staying at a Zen monastery, and most of my fellow "lay trainees" did not know that I was a Christian priest. One day one of the monks addressed me as "Reverend Philip". Thereupon a trainee said, "Oh, are you a priest?", meaning no doubt a Zen priest. I explained who I was, whereupon exclaimed "Oh, I thought all Christians were bigots!". That, I felt, was a moment of mission, and no more need be said.

Be warned, however, of a particular pitfall in mixing religious practice. This is the danger of syncretism or selectivity. By this I mean that it is all too easy to select the elements of different religions which happen to suit us at the time, and to weave them into a system which then becomes a 'do-it-yourself' or a 'pick-your~own' religion. This negates the whole enterprise. For the purpose of religion as I see it, is

not only to comfort and inspire, but also to challenge and confront us. If God, or the Eternal, as the Buddhists would say, is ultimate Reality, then it must follow that he is prepared to knock off all the "superfluous knobs and excrescencies" of our selfish ego, providing that we will let him. Every religion will in some aspect challenge us, but only if we take it all the way.

A very important concept is that of function. Rather than putting doctrines side by side and suggesting that they are equivalent, we need to understand how the elements in the different religions fulfil the same function. I would suggest that the Eucharist in Christianity and the formal Meal-time ceremony in Zen Buddhism fulfil a similar function. This is not to say that the Eucharist is the same as the Meal-time ceremony -that would be patently absurd, but there are parallel ceremonies and teachings in different religions that fulfil the same function. This is surely what we should expect, because human beings only have a limited number of basic needs which all religions must be able to meet if they are to survive.

Be wise but bold. Be wise and check out what is happening in your spiritual life with a person you can trust and this may be a priest of either tradition, or it may be a godly lay person. But also be bold, even though this may entail some suffering on your part, because false trails and dead ends have a way of becoming apparent and sorting themselves out in due time.

So it is my hope that some of our Philosophi will enrich their Christian faith and practice by dipping a toe in those of another religion. You may well have the kind of experience which I have found. Often, when I have attended a Buddhist talk on a Saturday evening, and then gone to church on the Sunday morning, the Christian Scriptures have struck me with a new force and relevance. Christ, our universal Lord is greater than all the worlds religions put together.

Chaplain General

The History of the Fraternity

Part 4

Like all topics and explanations that concern the mysteries it is most difficult to try and decide what is fact and what is allegory. For example, there has always been some doubt whether the name Rosicrucian did in fact come from the rose and the cross, or whether Father C.R.C. was the literal founder of the Order in and about 1400. There is a report that the word Rosicrucian comes from the word 'Ros', which means 'dew'. It is also interesting that 'Ras' means ;wisdom; and 'Rus' is translated as 'concealment'; all of which are both important and relevant. Arthur Waite believes that it was the word 'dew' that was the secret concealed within the name.

One aspect however that is certainly clear is the connection of the Rosicrucians and Freemasonry. Many of those connected with the development of Freemasonry were suspected of being Rosicrucians; some, as in the case of Robert Fludd even wrote about this brotherhood. Similarly Elias Ashmole, who was also an eminent Freemason. Some authorities are even of the opinion that it was Sir Francis Bacon who had a hand in the writing of the Fama and Confessio, because they are said to have a very similar rhetorical style to Bacon's 'New Atlantis'.

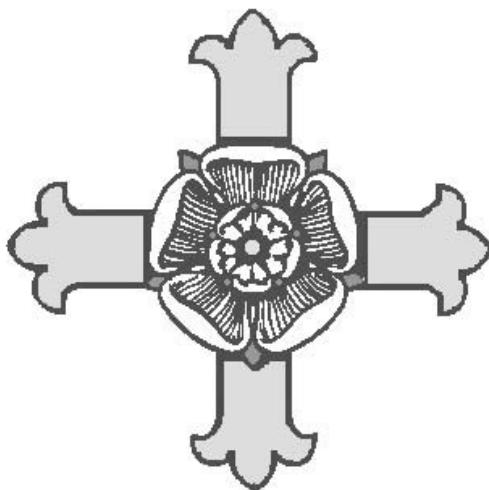
However, even though the authorship may be in some doubt, the adepts of the Brotherhood were most certainly men of a very higher order in terms of their evolution. Candidates were only accepted after long periods of probation and it took many years for them to complete their training. This, as now in most occult societies, included the transmutation of the base metals. Whether this was in purely physical or allegorical terms is open to question, but as most students of the Qabalah will know, all of the alchemical metals are precisely placed on the Tree of Life with the purest gold at the centre of Tiphareth; the position of Apollo and the position of the Solar Logos, to which we all must try to aspire. Thus the transformation of the base metals of our instincts into the gold of our Divines Spark is a task that we must all master.

The vault shows us the way because the vault is an allegory for ourselves. There were seven sides and these allude to the seven Elohim; the seven days of Creation and the seven lower Sephiroth of the Qabalah, with the Supernal Triad shining forth as a brilliant white light at the centre of the upper level. This is a symbol of our bodies. There is the brilliant Divine Spark illuminating the perfect potential which we all have deep within ourselves, but which remains hidden beneath a very crude and superficial layer of the plasterwork of our personalities. We should also remember that the central lamp at the focus of the ceiling of the vault is emblematic of the everlasting and eternal nature of our Divine Spark as opposed to the plasterwork of our bodily flesh which is both mortal and transient. It is the Divine aspect of each one of us that can illuminate our lives and lead us to escape that cycle of birth and death which is amply illustrated by the state of the body of our Master within the tomb.

One of the most important things that we must all remember is that to call a person a Rosicrucian does not make him one; for precisely the same reason that to call a person a Christian does make him a Christ. The real Rosicrucian or Mason cannot be made; he must grow to be one by the expansion and unfolding of the Divine Will in his heart; the gradual expansion of his consciousness to encompass the Universe instead of just himself and the natural and fluidic inclusion in his daily life of square conduct, upright intentions and right actions in his daily life. It is the lack of attention to these truths that is the cause for so many of the churches, sects and secret societies from being far from that which their names express.

God is not a problem to be solved or a solution to be admitted, but He is a reality to be possessed, known, contemplated, conversed with, enjoyed and loved. Because God made man in his own image the power to respond to the divine life which is at the centre of all things is in built, and we should recognise that the Son of God is the personal disclosure of God to man. There is a natural body and there is a spiritual body and in Christ the Deity dwells bodily as a person. It is this that was the aim of the Rosicrucians and it is this that should be our constant aim.

Christian Rosencreutz may or may not have been an actual personality. He may or may not have been a system of spiritual philosophy, but he most certainly was the embodiment of those precepts that we as Masons hold most dear. Therefore and especially to those of us who presume to call ourselves Rosecrucians we should for ever hold that symbol of the Rose and the Cross vividly before us every minute of every day. It will maintain the mental and visible contact that exists between Him who is the Rose who was crucified upon the Cross of the Elements and ourselves. It is this contact that enables us to receive His help in times of crisis; His assistance through the maze of our daily lives and His Love and Grace which can flow to aid and assist in the transmutation of the metals of our base natures into that Heavenly Gold.



Recommended Reading

The Penguin Dictionary of Religions - Ed J.R. Hinnells, Penguin, 1984

A New Dictionary of Theology - Ed. A. Richardson & J. Bowden, SCM, London, 1983

A History of Christianity , Paul Johnson, Penguin, 1990

The Secret Teachings of All Ages (An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Qabbalistic & Rosicrucian Symbolical Philosophy.) Manly P. Hall, 1988

The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols Chevalier & A. Gheerbrant, Transl. Buchanan-Brown, Penguin, 1996

A History of God (From Abraham to the Present: the 4000-year Quest for God.) Karen Armstrong, Vintage, Gt. Britain, 1999

The Varieties of Religious Experience William James, Collins/Fount, 1977

The Religious Experiences of Mankind Ninian Smart, Collins/Fount, 1977

Encyclopedia Britannica (Now available on CD-Rom.)

Points of Contemplation

1. Describe the Badge of Admission used in this Grade and its Significance.
2. What is the difference between Knowledge and Wisdom?
3. What is the nature of God?
4. What does the phrase "the Mountain of Wisdom" signify to you?
5. What does this Grade say about the requisites for Salvation, and do you agree?
6. List some of the teachings, which are common to the world Religions.
7. List some of the teachings which are unique to the Christian Religion.
8. List the names of God used in the major Religions of the world.
9. Comment on the phrase "I think therefore I am"
10. What to you is Reality?