

## **An Interlaced Symbol: The Rose and The Cross**

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### ***The Rose and the Cross***

*by Aleister Crowley*

*Out of the seething cauldron of my woes,  
Where sweets and salt and bitterness I flung;  
Where charmed music gathered from my tongue,  
And where I chained strange archipelagoes  
Of fallen stars; where fiery passion flows  
A curious bitumen; where among  
The glowing medley moved the tune unsung  
Of perfect love: thence grew the Mystic Rose.*

*Its myriad petals of divided light;  
Its leaves of the most radiant emerald;  
Its heart of fire like rubies. At the sight  
I lifted up my heart to God and called:  
How shall I pluck this dream of my desire?  
And lo! there shaped itself the Cross of Fire!*



The Scottish Rite's Chapter of Rose Croix is the Historical and Religious Degrees (15<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup>). They are very complex and attempt to invest the Aspirant with a deeper understanding of Religion, Philosophy, Ethics, and History. The intellectual challenges presented in these degrees, are at times overwhelming, and can take years to master. Whatever your religious faith, you are encouraged to ponder the philosophy and teachings of the Nazarene, especially the doctrine of fraternal love and service toward all mankind. The three cardinal virtues of Freemasonry, Faith, Hope and Charity were so beautifully illustrated in the life of Christ.

The Eighteenth Degree is the capstone of the Chapter of Rose Croix Degrees. It is known by various names: Sovereign Prince of Rose Croix; Sovereign Prince of Rose Croix of Heredom or Knight of Saint Andrew of Scotland; Knight of the Black Eagle; and Knight of the Eagle and Pelican. The name "Rose Croix" is derived from the emblems of the Rose and Cross.

The degree is divided into two major Apartments and two minor Apartments. It is the major Apartments that is our interest, the Chamber of Darkness and the Chamber of Light.<sup>1</sup>

The Chamber of Darkness represents the world is lost, it has failed to bring peace and harmony, and the Word is lost. Its color is black, symbolizing death and feminine qualities of vulnerability, insecurity and lack of confidence, and red, symbolizing passion, fire and fury. Its jewel is the compasses, open at 60°, resting on a quadrant, or segment of a circle. The compasses are crowned. Resting on the quadrant is an eagle in silver with its head lowered. Its wings are open but not spread. Above the eagle is a passion cross in crimson. The eagle on the jewel symbolizes Supreme Wisdom and Intelligence, deriving that meaning from the ancient Egyptians who remarked that the eagle's wings bore him high toward the light and away from the clouds.

The Chamber of Light represents the world after the rediscovery of the Word. Its colors are white, representing a fresh beginning and goodness, and crimson, represents passion, energy, and masculine qualities. Its jewel is the compasses, open at 60°, and resting on a quadrant, or segment of a circle. The compasses are crowned. Resting on the quadrant is a pelican nest, containing seven hatchlings and perched on the edge of the nest is the pelican, piercing her breast with her beak. It was anciently believed that the pelican tore her breast to nourish her young with her own blood. Thus, the pelican became a symbol of self-sacrifice, philanthropy, and devotedness. It also symbolized the bounty of nature, from which all living things draw their sustenance. Behind the silver pelican is a crimson passion cross. At the base is a sprig of acacia, and at the point of the cross bar is a crimson rose in full bloom

To add to the symbolism, the compasses in both jewels represent spiritual awareness and self-control. The compasses are crowned to symbolize the Mason is highest in rank among his equals. The crown also symbolizes the sovereignty of the people and the rights of self-government and self-determination. The eagle and pelican, together, symbolize, respectively, perfect wisdom and perfect devotedness. The initials on the jewels, I.N.R.I., *Jesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum* "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews", reminds us that reason and faith are both essential elements of wisdom.

The Rose and the Cross is one of Freemasonry's most profound symbols, created by combining two separate symbols paired together to form one unified idea. Freemasonry is full of such examples, most notable the Square and

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<sup>1</sup> 18<sup>th</sup> Degree, Knight Rose Croix, Jim Tresner, 33° GC, <http://www.angelfire.com/va/mason/sr18.htm>

Compasses. Both the Square and the Compasses are architect tools used to teach symbolic lessons. The Square to square our actions and the Compasses to circumscribe and keep us in due bounds with all mankind. As measuring instruments, the tools represent judgment and discernment.

The Rose Cross has many meanings.

It symbolizes union of opposites and dualism in nature. It is believed to have been adopted by the Christian Church in its first century, as a symbol of masculine principle, the cycle of birth and death (the cross) and the rose symbolizes the blood of Christ and the power of redemption, and represents Christ's mother, Mary because the rose has always been closely associated with her. In a Christian sense, the cross signifies acceptance of sacrifice, suffering, death, and immortality.

It symbolizes the teachings of a western esoteric tradition that the cross of Christ was made from wood from the Tree of Knowledge, the cause of the Fall, making it the instrument of Redemption.

In Egyptian mythology, the ankh - a type of cross - was a symbol of life, immortality, and health and represented the union of Isis, Goddess of magic and motherhood, and Osiris, the ruler of Earth.

Adopted by Freemasons in the 18th Century, it was used in the Rectified Scottish Rite, Christian Freemasonic Group founded in Lyon, France, the Rosicrucian Masonic Rites founded in Scotland, and in the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite it represents the Eighteenth Degree, the "Knight Rose Croix".

It symbolizes the immutability and goodness of God; the immorality of the soul; the ultimate defeat of evil; the planets; the elements; and the twenty-two paths on the Tree of Life and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

The degrees of the Chapter of Rose Croix embody the period of the world in which they were written and apply with equal force today. They teach war against ignorance, intolerance and error, and that the chief stumbling block in the way to success is the indifference of its members and the world; every noble heart is God's temple and we should labor to establish the reign of love and peace thus building a lasting temple of God. Its history of religion refers to the written record of human religious experiences and ideas. John the Baptist taught creeds older than Christianity, which must have belonged to the sect of the Essenes, very similar to Christianity. Light was the symbol of good; darkness was evil. In all times truth has been concealed in symbols. The cross has been a sacred emblem of earliest antiquity among many nations. The rose

is a symbol of dawn, of the resurrection of life. Together the rose and the cross represent the dawn of eternal life.

Reviewing *Morals and Dogma*, Albert Pike surely believed that the Rose Cross taught three things: the immortality of God, the immortality of the soul, the final destruction of the wickedness and of an upcoming savior.<sup>2</sup> The search for Light, Divine Truth, is an on-going process, but the self-centered man will never find Light. The further we develop the more we become the servant and the less we become the master of others. There is a fundamental unity to all great systems of thought and philosophy which underlie any apparent differences. Truth is scattered throughout all religions and all systems of thought. It is the task of man to gather these scattered sparks of Light and to create, for himself, a true philosophy based on them. This Truth, when properly understood, will produce perfect harmony and insight. Therefore, it must be cherished, protected and spread. We must base our lives on Faith, Hope and Charity, and strengthen, purify and direct our personal quest for the divine within ourselves, and truly understand the basis of our relationships with others.

In conclusion, the Eighteenth Degree, Knight Rose Croix, teaches that life and its strengths come from God. The rose signifies the dawn and the cross is a sacred symbol of antiquity in many cultures. We are to be tolerant of others' errors and faults. And I.N.R.I. reminds us to use our senses and minds to better understand the Grand Architecture's creation, nature, and why He provided us with *faith*. Like Aleister Crowley's poem, the *Rose and Cross*, *Reason and Faith* – united – provides pure light for our path to Divine Truth



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<sup>2</sup> *Morals and Dogma*, Albert Pike, Prepared for The Supreme Council, 33°, S.J., USA, 1962

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