Rosicrucian Manifestos

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The **Rosicrucian Manifestos** were two documents of unknown authorship written in the early 17th century in Europe. They purported to announce the existence of a hitherto unknown esoteric order, the Brotherhood of the Rose Cross, to the world. The *Fama Fraternitatis* and the *Confessio Fraternitatis* as they were known, caused an immense furore across Europe with their esoteric imagery and call for a universal spiritual and cultural reformation across the continent. To this day controversy continues whether they were a hoax, whether the Order of the Rose Cross really existed as described in the Manifestos, or whether the whole thing was a metaphor or ludibrium disguising a movement that really existed, but in a different form. Since their publication and translation into several different languages the idea of the Rosicrucian movement and the image of the Rose Cross itself have never gone away with many modern Rosicrucian organizations claiming spiritual filiation with the original Order, such as the Rosicrucian Fellowship and the Lectorium Rosicrucianum, or claiming an historical heritage, such as AMORC.

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Appearance and content of the Manifestos

The *Fama Fraternitatis* and *Confessio Fraternitatis* appeared in Kassel, Germany in 1614 and 1615 respectively. To this day no-one knows who was behind them, although suspicion rests on Lutheran theologian and mystic Johannes Valentinus Andreae, who is thought to be Brother I A in the *Fama*. Even if Andreae was the prime mover in their publication (we know, for instance, that he was responsible for *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz* and had a hand in the *Fama* as his autobiography suggests) this does not rule out the possibility of a group authorship.

The Manifestos purport to announce the existence of a two hundred year old secret order founded by the mysterious figure of Christian Rosenkreutz (Christian RosyCross in English). Both are filled with references to the Kabbalah, Hermeticism and Alchemy as well as the more familiar imagery of Christianity. As with everything else to do with the Manifestos, there is much discussion as to whether Rosenkreutz really existed as described, whether he is intended to be an allegorical figure or whether Christian Rosenkreutz was a pseudonym or spiritual name adopted by a real person after his Initiation into whatever Mysteries he encountered.

The *Fama* goes into detail about the founding of the order and the history of Rosenkreutz himself. He is described as a man of great learning, esoteric understanding and healing power who traveled in the Middle East in search of knowledge. He is said to have visited the Arab city of Damcar (possibly Damascus) where he was met by Muslim sages and mystics (possibly Sufis) 'as a friend'. There he is meant to have learned a great deal of esoteric wisdom and knowledge before returning to Europe where, having been rejected by the academic and religious authorities of the day he founded the secret Brotherhood or Order of the Rose Cross, now known as the Rosicrucians. This order is described as consisting of a group of learned men dedicated to the wellbeing of mankind who would travel the world healing and teaching and meeting annually in a specially appointed place. A brief outline of the history of the early Brethren along with the initials of their names is given.

The *Fama Fraternitatis* also describes the present Brothers of the Rose Cross who have continued the work of the original Order and gives an account of their discovery of the hidden tomb of Rosenkreutz. This consists of a secret vault of seven sides and three levels filled with miraculous objects and books of wisdom and learning. In the centre of the vault lies Rosenkreutz himself, his body perfectly preserved even after the passing of over a century.

The *Confessio Fraternitatis* continues the themes of the *Fama*, describing in more detail the vision of the Rose Cross of a 'general Reformation' of Europe and the creation of the invisible 'Spiritus Sancti', a community of the Spirit where the Rose Cross may flourish unseen. Like the *Fama*, the *Confessio* invites the curious and the worthy to contact the Rosicrucian Brotherhood but warns to stay away if the motivation to do so is merely riches and personal advancement. The *Confessio* also insists upon the firm Christian foundation of the Rose Cross movement, perhaps in response to accusations of necromancy and black magic among its detractors.

Result of the Manifestos

The printing of the Manifestos caused an enormous reaction in intellectual and occult circles in Europe with leading lights of science and

learning seeking to find and make contact with them. René Descartes is just one of the many cultural giants of the time who tried to reach them without success. The promise of a spiritual and cultural transformation of Europe towards a greater harmony at a time of great turmoil added to the suggestion of access to enormous esoteric and mystical knowledge proved hugely exciting and attractive to many. People announced themselves as Rosicrucians, others denounced them as charlatans, efforts to locate them were endlessly frustrated, fueling speculation that they were a hoax and yet others (such as Robert Fludd) wrote passionate defenses of their ideas. At one point, perhaps dismayed by how the Rosicrucian craze was getting out of hand, Andreae tried to bring the whole thing to a halt, writing of his shock at how ridiculous the whole thing had become and that the 'game' (suggesting he had never intended for the Manifestos to be taken so literally) was now 'over'. Whether this indicates that the whole thing was a hoax or that Andreae was trying to protect something which had become public property in the wrong way is up for debate.

Over the years, many influential names have been associated with the original Manifestos including Francis Bacon, whose initials correspond to one of the Brothers mentioned in the later group. Even Shakespeare has at times been linked to the movement, as has Dr John Dee whose Monad Hieroglyphic appears on the front page of *The Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*. The Rosicrucian ideal, real or not, caught the imagination of esotericists across Europe and if it had not originally existed as an Order, it began to do so as a consequence and certainly does now in a number of forms. Figures such as Elias Ashmole and Robert Fludd identified themselves as Rosicrucians and organizations such as Freemasonry absorbed and were deeply influenced by their ideas. Indeed the Golden Rose Cross features as an important symbol in Freemasonry and different degrees are referred to in terms of the image. In her book *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* historian Frances Yates makes a persuasuve case for the scientific, cultural and political force of the Rosicrucians particularly in Protestant Europe subsequent to the Manifestos.

By the 19th Century the rise in interest in Esotericism and the occult in France, Britain and America saw the founding of new Rosicrucian Orders, all claiming a connection with the original group. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn made extensive use of Rosicrucian imagery and ideas, as did Aleister Crowley. Less flamboyant and more recent expressions of the Rose Cross include Max Heindel's *Rosicrucian Fellowship* and Jan van Rijckenborgh's *Lectorium Rosicrucianum* both of which pursue differing forms of Esoteric Christianity. Both Heindel and van Rijckenborgh have written extensive commentaries on the Manifestos and the writing of Johannes Valentinus Andreae.

See also

- Parabola Allegory
- Protestant Reformation

References

- Christopher McIntosh: *The Rosicrucians: The History, Mythology and Rituals of an Esoteric Order* Weiser Books 1988 ISBN 0877289204
- Michael Maier/ Johannes Valentinus Andreae/ Vaughan Waldenses. *A Rosicrucian Primer: Ancient Landmarks of the Rosicrucians* Holmes Publishing Group 1994 ISBN 1558182772
- Frances Yates *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment*. Routledge 2001 ISBN 0415267692
- *Rosicrucians Through the Ages* Rozekruis Pers/ Rosycross Press ISBN 90-67323233

External links

- Fama Fraternitatis: Full online text (http://levity.com/alchemy/fama.html)
- Confessio Fraternitatis: Full online text (http://levity.com/alchemy/confessi.html)
- Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz: Full online text (http://www.rosecroixjournal.org/resources/documents/chymical_wedding.pdf)
- Positio Fraternitatis: Full online text (http://www.rosecroixjournal.org/resources/documents/G-20%20Manifesto%20Positio_101807.pdf)

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