

ROBERT FLUDD'S ROSE AND CROSS

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In this article, Peter Bindon explores Robert Fludd's Rose and Cross image from the work Summum Bonum (published in 1629), one of several texts that Fludd wrote in defense of the Rosicrucians.

There is some debate about the connection between Robert Fludd and the Brethren of the Rosy Cross, as Rosicrucians were known 350 years ago. However it is very clear from both his writings and what others wrote about him that Fludd was greatly conversant with the principles of Rosicrucians. His Rose and Cross image is full of symbolism relating to Rosicrucian thinking.

Fludd was born in 1574 and died in 1637. Although he lived and worked at medicine most of his time in England, he also traveled in Europe and most likely associated with like-minded individuals during his six years there. He became a Bachelor and later a Doctor in Medicine at Oxford University. However, he was considered unorthodox because he consulted each patient's horoscope in diagnosis and he used what seemed like homeopathic remedies. Fludd was what one today would call a holistic healer. He maintained that the mind and the spirit of the patient must be healed first and any disease second. Fludd's radical ideas about medicine and cures caused him great difficulties in becoming accepted by the medical community but eventually he was admitted as a Fellow in the Royal College of Physicians. His book, *A Compendious Apology for the Fraternity of the Rosy Cross...* published in 1617 shows that he was a most enthusiastic supporter of The Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross but he never claimed that he was a member of that group. Of course this is no surprise because at that time

it was dangerous to one's own health to claim to be anything other than a very orthodox citizen! Robert Fludd's Rose and Cross first appeared as an illustration in his *Summum Bonum* Part 4 published in 1629, another defense of the Rosicrucian Fraternity. The Latin inscription means: The Rose Gives Honey to Bees. This is a perfectly innocent observation, but why would Fludd say something so obvious? It has been suggested that there is a lot more here than Fludd says.

Let us examine some of the symbolism in this drawing.

The language of the Rose has filled whole books and is too extensive to be discussed here. We may observe however, that the rose is associated with love, and this virtue is central to Rosicrucian symbolism. First, Love, along with Light and Life, occupies one of the points of the Triangle of Manifestation mentioned in Rosicrucian rituals. Second, we are advised to "Love one another," in the words that Christ used, so that our soul personality might unfold as do the petals of a rose advancing to maturity. Third, the mystic rose representing the soul personality unfolds on the cross of service in our most potent and easily recognized symbol, that of the Rose Cross of those content to labor at their personal growth. The rose stands in the garden of the soul. The bees of course are symbolic of labor. Imagine the combined effort of the individual insects that is necessary to condense one liter of honey from the nectar of thousands of



Robert Fludd's Rose and Cross. *Dat Rosa Mel Apibus*. Hand-painted mural in the Rosicrucian Cultural Center of New York City, Harlem, New York. Photo by Leo Adams, FRC.

flowers. The labor of the alchemists and healers was no less intense. For us this symbol indicates that progress in mystical development does not take place without considerable personal effort. The Light of Rosicrucianism carried by our Rosicrucian Groups is likewise the combination of many tiny lights. This was another illustration related to the symbolism of the bees in their hive. Bees are necessary in a garden to ensure that the potential fertility of the plants is manifested in their fruits. Unless the flowers receive the attention of some pollinating mechanism, they wither and die unfulfilled. Bees are the eternal symbol of the natural progression of life, even in our less than poetic language, where reproduction is often coyly referred to as an activity for “The Birds and Bees.”

The trellis and vines in Fludd's illustration remind us that we are in a garden. The “Wine of the Grape” has long been a symbol of the rich rewards that enterprise can bring. In this instance it is also reminiscent of a transformative function, because many separate processes are required to transform the grape on the vine into the wine

as something pleasurable, but despite the adversities we encounter, the evolution of our soul personality proceeds all the more rapidly because of the resolution and fortitude we exhibit.

The spider is symbolic of the pitfalls that must be avoided in life. Just as the web catches the unwary bee, so distraction, lack of focus, indolence, and other vices catch the imprudent gardener of the soul. Robert Fludd has provided us with a number of linked symbols in this illustration. He has artfully camouflaged the fact that the rose itself is carried on a cross. The arms of the cross are formed by stumpy branches, the likes of which are not seen on actual plants. To avoid any mistake in interpretation, Fludd's cross is intentionally remote from the cross of crucifixion adopted by the Christian church. We are thus not to confuse this cross with one of religious symbolism. Although there may be parallels between the two kinds of crosses, Fludd's brings us directly to contemplate the idea of the cross of service on which unfolds the rose of the developing soul personality.

which nourishes the soul. Again we recall that labor is required to make the garden productive. The wave-like aspect to the surface of the garden can simply be thought of as representing what we say even today are “the ups and downs of life.” We understand that every single moment may not be experienced at the moment

