

## **The Masonic and Military Order of the Red Cross of Constantine and the Orders of the Holy Sepulchre and of St. John the Evangelist**

I am sure that all of the various Masonic Orders which are practised here in the UK bring something special to their members. Clearly, Craft Masonry is the starting point for all of us and it needs to be given our fullest commitment, but it seems to me that Freemasonry in general provides the opportunities, through the other Orders, to support and compliment what we individually consider important in the way that we conduct our lives. Therefore for me personally the Christian Orders are particularly special, one of which of course is the Masonic and Military Order of the Red Cross of Constantine, and the Orders of the Holy Sepulchre and of St. John the Evangelist, and I am very privileged to be currently serving as Intendant-General of the Division of East Anglia. For me there could not have been a more satisfying and inspirational appointment.

### **The Military and Masonic Order of the Red Cross of Constantine and the Orders of The Holy Sepulchre and of St. John the Evangelist**

The Masonic and Military Order of the Red Cross of Constantine and the Orders of the Holy Sepulchre and of St. John the Evangelist are three Christian Orders which take their members through a very Christian 5 stage journey which for me closed the “Masonic loop” as it explains the Craft and Chapter allegories in a Christian context, and it is the Order in which the true word of Masonry is revealed. As the title suggests, it also has Military or Knightly associations, and the rituals are conducted with dignity and precision – or at least they should be. In my experience they generally are, and the members work hard to achieve high standards in the ceremonies. The entry requirement into the Order is membership of the Royal Arch and belief in the Holy Trinity.

The Masonic and Military Order of the Red Cross of Constantine basically consists of three Masonic Degrees – Knight, Priest and Sovereign Prince – titles which represent grades in the scale of initiation. These are supplemented by two additional Knightly grades of the Appendant Orders, and collectively they form the complete Rite as follows:

- Knight of the Red Cross of Constantine
- Knight of the Holy Sepulchre
- Knight of St. John the Evangelist
- Priest Mason - Eminent Viceroy (Venerable Eusebius)
- Perfect Prince Mason - Puissant Sovereign (Constantine)

Before I proceed to share with you the detail of the Masonic Degrees of the Order I would like to provide for you the historic background to these Masonic Orders.

Caius Flavius Valerius Aurelius Claudius Constantine (circa AD 270 – 337) was a son of Flavius Constantinus Chlorus and his consort Helena. He succeeded his father as Governor of Spain, Gaul and Britain, and was proclaimed Emperor of the West by the Roman Legions at York in 306, and with the subsequent defeat of Maxentius (at the battle of Saxa Rubra at Milvian Bridge near Rome in AD 312) established his position, and he was accepted and acknowledged by the Senate as Augustus Maximus. He finally defeated the joint Emperor Licinius near Byzantium in AD 323. He then became Emperor of the East and West and transferred his official seat from Rome to Byzantium which was later renamed Constantinople. Constantine was the first Roman Emperor to openly embrace and encourage Christianity. The legend of his conversion to Christianity being that Constantine received a vision from the “Unknown God” on the eve of his battle with Maxentius.

Whilst Constantine was praying for inspiration and wisdom for the following battle there appeared in the heavens a pillar of light in the form of a cross. This was deemed a most auspicious omen, by both Constantine and his army, and Constantine had a Royal Standard made bearing a cross, like that which had appeared in the vision, and this standard led his legions into battle the following day. Tradition relates that prior to the battle a number of his knights who were Christian came forward and openly avowed their Faith. The Emperor directed them to wear on their armour a Red Cross

with sixteen stars.

As I mentioned previously, Constantine was the first Roman Emperor to openly embrace and encourage Christianity. He convened a series of Councils of Bishops, one of which at the Council of Nicea in AD 325 the Nicene Creed was promulgated. The Masonic Degree of the Red Cross of Constantine is known to have been extant from at least 1770 but it was not until 1865 that it was organised into a sovereign Masonic Order. Its original title was the Imperial and Ecclesiastical Order of the Red Cross of Rome and Constantine. There were two Bishops contemporary with Constantine named Eusabius, both of whom featured prominently in his life and also fell out of favour with Constantine. It is not certain on which of these bishops the Venerable Eusebius of our ritual is based, but one, Eusebius Pamphili of Caesarea recorded the Emperor's vision of the Cross in the sky, and was instrumental in the development of the Nicene Creed, and the other Eusebius of Nicomedia became Bishop of Constantinople and baptised the Emperor prior to his death.

The second Order of Knight of the Holy Sepulchre is based on the finding of the Cross of Jesus, by Helena, Constantine's mother in AD 326 and the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre by Constantine and Helena on the site where the cross was found and encompassing the site of the crucifixion. The Order of the Knight of the Holy Sepulchre of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ was instituted in circa AD1100 and confirmed by the Pontiff Callistus II in 1122. The Patriarch of the Holy City was appointed chief of the Order and the Knights were selected from the Red Cross fraternity. These Knights were charged with guarding the Holy Sepulchre, protecting pilgrims and to repel the attacks of all infidels and enemies of the cross of Christ.

The ritual of the third Order, the Masonic Order of the Knights of St. John the Evangelist, is based on the events that took place during the brief reign of Emperor Julian (the Apostate). It relates how he failed in his endeavours to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem in AD360, and further recounts how a remarkable discovery was made amongst the ruins. It embodies a most interesting and instructive legend, as it successfully encompasses the allegories of the Craft and the Holy Royal Arch ceremonies from a purely Christian standpoint.

Now let me concentrate on the Masonic aspects of the Order.

The Masonic and Military Order of the Red Cross of Constantine and the Appendant Orders of the Holy Sepulchre and St. John the Evangelist provide a thought provoking Christian masonic journey explaining the allegories of Craft and Royal Arch Masonry in their Christian context.

The Order of the Red Cross of Constantine (RCC) contains three separate masonic degrees.

The first degree of the RCC, Knight-Mason, is a unique masonic ritual wherein a companion of the Royal Arch is duly received as a pilgrim and elevated to the sublime rank of a Perfect Knight-Mason. The ceremony is short and simple, but teaches valuable moral lessons to the candidate, based upon the story of the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine to Christianity prior to the Battle of Saxa Rubra at Milvian Bridge in AD 312. The first degree of the rite, leads from the Pagan Dispensation to the Christian, using the legend of the conversion of Constantine the Great as a symbol of the transition.

The second and third degrees of the Order of the Red Cross of Constantine are conferred following a Perfect Knight-Mason's election to the office of Viceroy and Sovereign respectively, and after they have received membership of the Appendant Orders, viz. Knight of the Holy Sepulchre and Knight of St. John the Evangelist.

In the second degree of the Order of the Red Cross of Constantine, performed in a College of Priests-Mason, the Knight-Mason is consecrated as a Venerable Priest-Mason and an Eusebius (representing Constantine's chief Bishop, Eusebius), and is one of the symbolic priesthoods. The ceremony is very spiritual in nature and incorporates more overtly the religious symbolism and ritual. Having received this degree the Venerable Priest-Mason, or installed Eusebius, is qualified to serve as a Viceroy of a Conclave.

In the third degree the Sovereign-elect completes his Christian journey, the title of Perfect Prince-Mason is conferred upon him and he is enthroned as the Most Puissant Sovereign of the Conclave,

and represents Constantine, Sovereign-Prince of the East and West. In this degree the explanation of the Christian symbolism of the Order is completed.

This degree completes the Rite of the Order of the Red Cross of Constantine.

The second Order, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, is alleged to have been founded as a Chivalric Order in AD326 following the discovery of the True Cross by (St) Helena, Constantine's mother. The symbolic ritual of the Masonic Order of the Holy Sepulchre is based upon the devotion of a select body of Knights designated to guard the Holy Place, and is particularly concerned with the period of time encompassing the Crucifixion and Resurrection.

The third Order, the Order St. John the Evangelist, completes the transition from the old pre-Christian era to the acceptance of the True Word as recorded in the Gospel of St. John. It is in this Degree that the Christian Masonic journey is completed, no further obligations are required, the Masonic allegories are explained and the true Word of Masonry is communicated.

These second and third Orders constitute the Appendent Orders, and the member has now been made a Knight of the three Orders – the Order of the Red Cross of Constantine, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre and the Order of St. John the Evangelist.

Within the Division of East Anglia we currently have 9 Conclaves meeting in Bury St. Edmunds, Cambridge, Chatteris, Great Yarmouth, Ipswich, Lowestoft, Sheringham and Watton. We are led by the Intendant General, who bears the title of Right Illustrious Knight. Currently, we hold biennial Church Services and these have been held to date at Wymondham Abbey. We join their sung evensong service (they are very rightly proud of their church music) and have a light buffet following the service.

Candidates for these very interesting and beautiful Orders of Freemasonry must be members of the Holy Royal Arch and profess a belief in the Trinitarian Christian faith.

[www.eastangliarcc.org.uk](http://www.eastangliarcc.org.uk)

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November 2024

