

AMORC

AMORC, the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, is the largest among several organizations that claim a genealogy dating back to the Rosicrucian movement of the seventeenth century. It insists that it is not a religion, and that it comprises members ("students") from several different religious backgrounds. AMORC was founded in 1915 by Harvey Spencer Lewis (1883-1939), a New York commercial artist who had been a founding member of the New York Society for Psychical Research, after a visit to France, where he claimed to have been initiated into the Rosy Cross in an "old tower" in Toulouse.

The order later moved successively to San Francisco, Tampa (Florida), and (in 1927) to San Jose, California, where its world headquarters became one of the city's main tourist attractions. They include a temple, a museum, a library, and a planetarium. Following AMORC's success in the United States, several more or less independent AMORCs were established in Europe. Some of them later went their separate ways, but Lewis, working jointly with Jeanne Guesdon (1884-1955), managed to keep the large French-speaking branch within the main fold. He was succeeded as leader of AMORC ("Imperator") by his son, Ralph Maxwell Lewis (1904-1987).

When Lewis Jr. died, Gary L. Stewart, despite being only 34 years old, was elected Imperator with the support of Raymond Bernard (1923-2006), the powerful leader of the French-speaking branch. Stewart was soon in conflict with the Board of Directors, however, and in 1990 was ousted and went on to found a splinter group known as the Confraternity of the Rose Cross. The Board replaced him with Raymond Bernard's son, Christian. The elder Bernard, in turn, distanced himself from AMORC and continued to establish a variety of separate organizations until his death in 2006.

Most AMORC members enroll in correspondence courses and follow the instructions included in the Order's "monographs", which they receive by mail. For the first nine degrees, initiations may be self-conferred at home (although they may also be received in a temple). Until 2001, when they were introduced by Christian Bernard, there were no initiations for the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth degrees because it was believed that the member, at this stage, was advanced enough to establish a direct contact with the occult hierarchy.

AMORC teaches that, ideally, humans should reincarnate every 144 years. Each student's aim, rather than to escape from the cycle of reincarnations, is to be received into the Great White Brotherhood through a "cosmic initiation." AMORC insists that it is the heir to a tradition dating right back to ancient Egypt and the Pharaoh Tutmosis III (†1450 BCE), and includes in its lineage of masters Jesus Christ himself. Astrology, occult anatomy, alchemy, and the study of the esoteric meaning of numbers, sounds, and geometrical shapes complete AMORC's teachings. AMORC remains, by far, the largest Rosicrucian organization in the world, with an estimated 120,000 members, and maintains a very visible presence, thanks to its temples,

publishing houses, and magazines, in several countries. Among AMORC's notable members was Mexican painter Diego Rivera (1886-1957), who insisted, curiously, that AMORC's "magical materialism" was compatible with his own Marxism.

Massimo INTROVIGNE

Bibliography

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