

THE ROSICRUCIAN SPIRITUAL TRADITION IN A MODERN WORLD

Imperator Claudio Mazzucco, FRC

Frater Claudio Mazzucco was installed as the Imperator of the Rosicrucian Order, AMORC during the AMORC World Convention in Rome, Italy, in August 2019. He also serves as the Grand Master of the Italian Grand Lodge, the President of the Supreme Grand Lodge of AMORC, and the Sovereign Grand Master of the Traditional Martinist Order. He was born in Italy, and grew up in Brazil, where he first joined the Order over 45 years ago.

Whatever conversation of a philosophical nature we engage in, it is a good practice, before starting the conversation, to reflect on the sense and meaning of the words that are about to be used. Taking the word “spirituality” for example, it is important to have a clear vision of its meaning within the context of Rosicrucian philosophy. To achieve this, we are going to use “art” as a means of gaining a clearer understanding, as the language of art touches many levels, awakening glimpses of truth in those who contemplate on it. I will begin with a few extracts from the writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson.



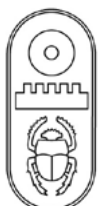
Emerson’s words awaken in us the idea that whatever we speak of is a vision, not in the sense of something requiring only the eyes to see, but a vision of an inner image which reveals itself to those who know how to research for it. Only those images that follow each thought and human expression make possible a first-hand description of the spiritual experience.

They must of necessity always be symbolic, evocative, and indirect, always suggesting Truth without ever pronouncing it. This is what Spirituality means to Rosicrucians.

Debussy was a member of a branch of the Rosicrucian tradition founded by Joséphin Péladan towards the end of the nineteenth century. I am not going to delve into this as I believe it is more useful to highlight certain aspects of Rosicrucian spirituality so you can conclude for yourself the meaning of Debussy’s affiliation to such an initiatic school.

A UNESCO Initiative

In 1996 UNESCO, a branch of the United Nations dedicated to education and the development of human abilities, published a paper on a study carried out by eminent scientists and educators of various nationalities. The study looked at how the development of an individual should be in the twenty-first century. Known as the Delors Report, this study highlighted four essential points which could be called four



fundamental pillars for the education of future generations:

- Learning to do.
- Learning to know.
- Learning to live together.
- Learning to be.

From a first analysis of these four points we can conclude that the first two are areas of focus for education, while the third and fourth are elements that each individual develops mainly within the family environment. In fact, this is how things used to be until the beginning of the twentieth century, when the transformation of contemporary society led the family to abdicate, for a variety of reasons, its fundamental role of preparation of the individual for life, through the affective and social relationships which are typical of a family nucleus. But the reasons for this change are best dealt with by sociologists and anthropologists. What is of importance to us are, however, the last two points: learning to live together and learning to be.

From a careful analysis, it is clear that these two points are essential for humans to be able to express their true potentials and to live harmoniously with others and their environment. The relevance of those two aspects becomes more evident

if we look at recent events in the world, particularly with regard to the environment and indeed the very survival of cultural diversity. It is therefore understandable why learning to live together and learning to be are such important pillars for human evolution. Without them, we are destined to be plagued indefinitely into the future by constant conflict with others, both internal and external conflict. And we will be incapable of adapting ourselves to the constantly changing conditions of life, not knowing how to maintain a healthy equilibrium with our environment and fellow human beings.

Seventeenth-century Transformation

Let us now jump back in time to the early years of the seventeenth century, in particular in the Rhineland-Palatinate region of central Germany. The seventeenth century as a whole was a dramatic time in European history: it began with the burning of Giordano Bruno, martyr of free thought and a symbol for all who sought their own Truth through personal Knowledge and experiences of the sacred.

Bruno's thoughts spread across Europe, particularly to Britain and Germany, influencing many prominent thinkers. Europe in the seventeenth



This statue of Giordano Bruno stands in the Campo de' Fiori in Rome, the site of his execution.

century underwent several periods of great transformation of thought and consciousness, influenced by Copernican theories: from the profound transformation of scientific thought in the works of Galileo Galilei, Francis Bacon, Isaac Newton, and several others, to the discoveries that radically modified the theologically led notion held until then of humankind's pre-eminence at the center of the Universe.

With navigation and the discovery of the New World barely 120 years before 1600, the rapid dissemination of philosophical and scientific thought was now possible, thanks to the initial development of the printing press in Gutenberg in the fifteenth century, followed by advances in mass-printing techniques. Such were the essential factors leading up to the rapid transformation that took place during the seventeenth century.

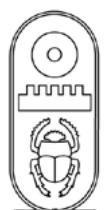
But with major changes came major crises as well. Northern Europe was under the influence of the Protestant Reformation which introduced the need for followers outside the clergy to become aware of the Sacred Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments without the intermediation of a priesthood. Indeed, Martin Luther had claimed that every Christian should be his or her own priest. And so it happened that over a mere few decades, literacy in northern Europe and Britain had become superior to that of southern Europe. In this context, the Palatinate in Germany under Protestant influence enjoyed a particular form of freedom, for the pre-eminent ruler of the region, Elector Friedrich V of the Holy Roman Empire, was considered modern by many of the learned of the time. Unlike many other powerful leaders, he had an open mind and was receptive to new ideas.

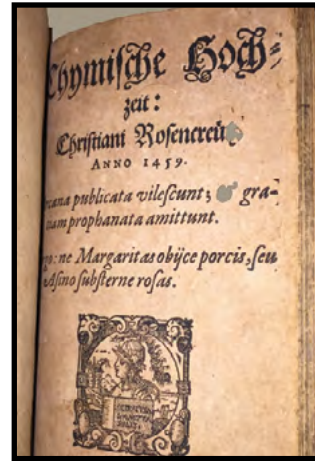
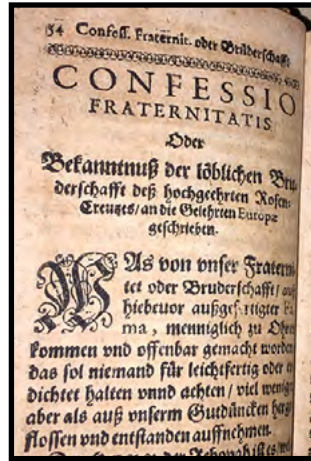
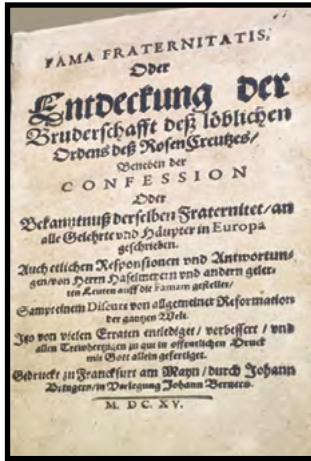


Sir Isaac Newton, by *Enoch Seeman* (1726).

Within a brief period then, the Palatinate became a center where many cultural and esoteric forms converged, such as the Kabbalistic, alchemical, and hermetic currents, as well as mathematicians and scholars of medicine, mechanics, and astronomy. He gathered together these areas of learning into a single center of development for education and knowledge in the broadest sense of the term.

It was during this period when the idea began to develop among the learned of Europe that the world was about to witness the realization of a Utopia on Earth. This was reinforced by the fact that Friedrich V would be marrying Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of King James I of England, who, with his military might, could have guaranteed the security of the reign of Friedrich. But this did not happen. Regarding the marriage between Friedrich and Elizabeth, the Shakespearean company took to the stage in Germany with various productions in honor of the royal couple. Shakespeare and his company, as will be discussed later, very likely played an important role in the genesis of Rosicrucianism.





The opening pages, from left to right, of the *Fama Fraternitatis*, *Confessio Fraternitatis*, and the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*.

The Rosicrucian Manifestos

Within this climate of intellectual, artistic, and spiritual rejuvenation, full of new hope, ideas, and projects, the first Rosicrucian Manifesto entitled the *Fama Fraternitatis* (*Fame of the Fraternity*) was published in 1614. It was followed in 1615 by the publication of the *Confessio Fraternitatis* (*Confession of the Fraternity*), and in 1616 by the *Chymical Wedding of Christian Rosenkreutz*. In 1624 Paris awakened to a display of posters plastered on the walls of the main churches of the city, reading as follows:

We, the Members of the Principal College of the Rosy-Cross, have taken up residence, visible and invisible, in this city, by the grace of the Most High, towards Whom are turned the hearts of the Just.

We demonstrate and teach to speak, without books or signs, to speak the different languages of the countries in which we dwell, to save Humankind, our fellow-people, from error and from death.

If someone wishes to see us merely out of curiosity, he will never make contact with us. But if his desire

truly brings him to register with our Fraternity, we, who base our judgement on thoughts, will show him the truth of our promises. For this, we do not make known the place of our stay in this city, since the thoughts united to the real desire of the seeker will lead us to him and him to us.

Scholars attribute the first two manifestos to a circle of eminent thinkers at the University of Tübingen, known as the “Tübingen Circle,” while the *Chymical Wedding* is attributed to Johann Valentin Andreae. The *Fama* tells the story of the legendary founder of the Brotherhood of the Rosy-Cross, Christian Rosenkreutz (CRC). It explains how CRC reached a high level of spiritual and philosophical preparation through a long journey that took him as far as the Middle East and possibly southern Arabia, and then by way of North Africa, Spain, and France, a return to Germany where he created a monastic Order, the Brethren of the Rosy Cross, consisting of only a few individuals.

In essence, the *Fama* not only made people aware of the existence of the Order, it also hoped to bring together wise people to expand the boundaries of

knowledge for the benefit of humanity as a whole. The story is almost certainly an allegory and its message was meant to be understood symbolically, not literally. The very image of CRC is a symbolic one and should be understood in esoteric rather than exoteric terms.

The *Confessio* complements and completes the *Fama*. On the one hand it emphasizes the “regeneration of Humankind” and society, and on the other hand it highlights one central point, that the Rosicrucian brethren possess a ‘philosophical science’ that enables such regeneration to occur. The *Confessio* was aimed primarily at seekers who were keen to participate in the work of the Order and for the benefit of humanity.

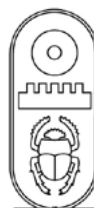
The *Chymical Wedding* is an allegorical description of an initiatic process with many alchemical references on the transformation of Humankind. It is about a marriage between a prince and a princess, and as a guest, CRC narrates the events that take place in the castle during the seven days of celebration. There is no need to delve too deeply into the three manifestos here, as it is a topic well catered for by academic research, most of it freely and easily available.

Rather, we will look at the fact that these manifestos gave rise to more than four hundred publications, some of which were highly critical of the Brotherhood, while others were commending and humbly requesting admission of their authors. Their impact on the world of culture and thought was very significant. One has only to think of Isaac Newton, the father of modern physics. When he died, he left in his library not just 30 books on chemistry and physics, but also 130 books on alchemy and hermetic philosophy, among them being the *Fama* and the *Confessio*.

René Descartes may have travelled to the Dutch Republic partly to escape persecution by the Inquisition in France and to enjoy the greater personal freedoms available in the republic. But another reason was to attempt to find the Rosicrucians. Spinoza too was associated with the movement, though with the advent of the ‘Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648), everything was swept away, leaving nothing but death and destruction from which Europe recovered only slowly and with much suffering. The Rosicrucian movement was, however, active in the Dutch Republic and Britain and, in 1693, some Rosicrucians, led by Grand Master Johannes Kelpius, sailed to the New World with the intention of building a Utopia as suggested in Francis Bacon’s 1627 book *The New Atlantis*.



Johannes Kelpius, by Christopher Witt (1705).





A 1730 map from Germany depicting Cockaigne, the imaginary land of luxury and ease, a kind of utopia.

Utopia

We are accustomed to thinking of a Utopia as being synonymous with a fantasy-land or unrealistic ideas about some idyllic state. The word “utopia” derives from the Greek word *outopos*, meaning “no place,” “nowhere,” or a “place that does not exist.” In *The Republic*, Plato indicates in a subtle way that “...Utopia is a form of Ideal Society. Perhaps it is impossible to achieve it on Earth, and yet a wise man must place all his hopes in it.”

An eminent Sufi thinker once said that for as long as humans seek Jerusalem as a place on a map, there will never be peace in the Holy Land. These words highlight the inherent nature of a Utopia, “a place that does not exist.” We have been taught that reality is made only of things that can be seen and touched. As the saying goes, we are modern people “with feet on the ground.” However, at the beginning of the twentieth century, science itself started dismantling this rigid and arid concept of reality, replacing it with a concept more elastic and pliable due to the presence of the human consciousness. And so it is that Rosicrucians have always maintained

that “thoughts are things.” Harmonious thoughts strengthen us and bring us well-being; discordant thoughts can lead to our death.

Thought and human consciousness are part of a dimension that is capable of acting upon what we interpret as “reality.” And if we think about this honestly a while, how many things from our present experience of reality are none other than the “pre-reality” thoughts that resided in the minds of enlightened individuals of the past? Utopia is for us therefore an “internal condition.” It is a dream, an aspiration written in the hearts of men, women, and children, being the meeting point of the many different phases of reality that exist. Rosicrucians established themselves in the state of Pennsylvania in the late seventeenth century, forming a community called Ephrata, named after the biblical town of Ephrata in the pre-Roman province of Judea. In Ephrata, the Rosicrucian community quickly developed printing facilities where important documents, some even about the European colonization of the Americas, were being printed.

Many soldiers wounded during the American Civil War 170 years later were cared for by members of this community; and those who were dying were comforted by readings of inspiring words from books and pamphlets printed by the first Rosicrucians in North America. As already stated, in Europe at the conclusion of the 'Thirty Years' War, the Rosicrucian movement gravitated to the relatively greater freedoms of Britain and the Dutch Republic. The Dutch Republic (which became the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1815) was renowned for its great spirit of religious and philosophical tolerance, while Britain was renowned as the country of Francis Bacon and Shakespeare. It is believed that Bacon had served as Emperor of the Rosicrucian Order at some time during the reign of James I, and may have been its custodian during a quiet phase of its existence after the outbreak of hostilities in the 'Thirty Years' War.

Shakespeare's plays were made up of a few actors who, if not Rosicrucians themselves, were sympathetic to their ideas. And it has even been suggested that some of the Shakespearean plays were either authored by or influenced by Francis Bacon. Towards the end of the 'Thirty Years' War the "Invisible College"

was formed in England and subsequently became the Royal Society, which was founded on principles well-known to have originated in the *Fama Fraternitatis*, calling together all wise people for the expansion of knowledge. Isaac Newton was its president for several years and the Rosicrucian Elias Ashmole was another. It is today one of the most reputable and authoritative scientific societies in the world.

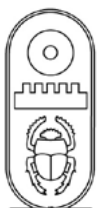
But the Rosicrucians, where did they end up? For a few years they remained in a state of secrecy, or *sub rosa*, remaining "below the rose." Nevertheless, the Order continued its activities in Europe until the end of the nineteenth century, when it resumed its activities together with the Martinist Order and various Masonic rituals disseminated mainly in France, Germany, and Italy.

The Salons Rose-Croix

In 1892 Parisians were invited to public events hosted by what was called the "Salon Rose-Croix." What did this and other salons consist of and what relationship do they have with current Rosicrucians? At the end of nineteenth century, the West was astonished in the face of new possibilities offered by



Proclamation of Peace after the Thirty Years' War, by *Franz Dietrich*.

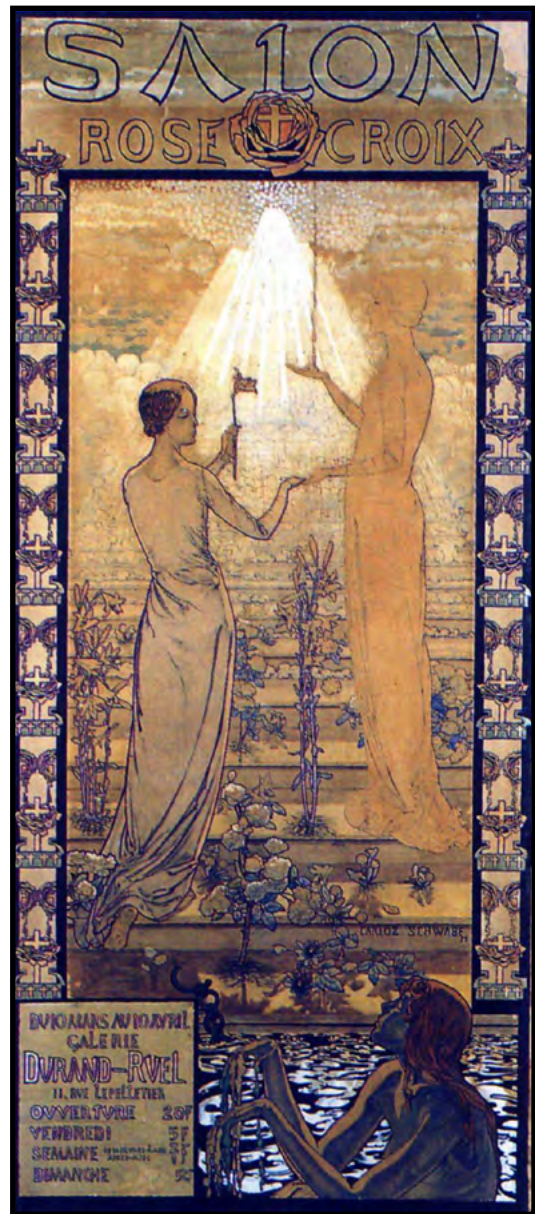


industrial science. Science triumphed and people felt that with the advent of the twentieth century, modernity would bring them happiness. Some enlightened minds however – philosophers, mystics, and artists – were concerned with the prospects offered by this progress. This concern was particularly felt through the Symbolists, a movement that gathered together artists of all disciplines.

Joséphin Péladan, organizer of the Salons and allied to the Rosicrucian movement, sided with the Symbolists and queried the problem in the following terms: “The speed of the material world accelerates the interior life. But a person, endowed with wings, does she not perhaps have the same heart and the same pain?” Péladan placed himself at the meeting point between the Symbolist and esoteric movements. As an artist he positioned himself in the Symbolist movement; as an esotericist he presented himself as an initiate of the Rosy-Cross.

His aim was to restore reverence of the Absolute in all its splendor, with Tradition as its base and Beauty an instrument. He saw the Latin civilization as being in a state of decadence. For him, only the enchantment of art could again save the West from an imminent disaster. He saw art as a tool capable of reversing the trend. The essential activity of the Order of the Rose+Cross of the Temple and of the Grail that he founded was therefore concerned with the organization of exhibitions and evenings dedicated to the fine-arts.

The poster made up in shades of blue, evokes the dream. It proposes a hierarchical trinity of humanity, symbolized by three women. The first woman is chained in muddy waters, looking at a stairway that rises towards the light, decorated with white lilies and roses. She represents



humanity longing for a better life, but is chained to the material world. The second woman has just liberated herself from her chains and mounts the first step of the stairway. This represents an initiate on her or his journey towards enlightenment. The third woman, translucent and radiant with light, receives in her hands a heart descending from the sky. This represents the mastery gained by anyone linked to the Divine. Péladan’s theory about art is derived from the Rosicrucian formula: “There is no other Truth but the Divine, there is no other Beauty but the Divine.”

Art is a search for the Divine through beauty. In his work “How to Become an Artist,” his theory on aesthetics was developed. For him, the mission of art represented the divine order. Art, together with religion, needs to magnify the divine element, enabling others to participate. Its beauty results from the balance between sight and vision. The perfect work is that which brings together all that is perfect, though it is not enough to satisfy the intellect alone.

Péladan assigns humankind the status of “artistic animal,” believing that there exists in humans an invisible attraction to beauty. This search for beauty is motivated by the nostalgic feelings of the lost harmony that a person instinctively seeks in all things. In his book *Idealistic and Mystic Art* he invites the artist to make a reflection. For him, the true artist is one who possesses the ability to listen, through contemplation, to the non-material qualities of objects that enable him to capture the celestial influx of “the Word” as the Divine Creator:



Joséphin Péladan.

Artist..., you know that art descends from heaven, just as life pours from the sun. That there is no masterpiece, that is not the reflection of an eternal idea.

You know, painter or poet that which is defined as abstract. There is a little part of the Divine even in a work of art.

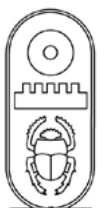
Learn that if you create a perfect form a soul will come to inhabit it. And what a soul, a spark from the Central Fire.

The Salon was inaugurated at a special ceremony with music specially composed by Erik Satie, a well-known Rosicrucian of his time. This was the environment in which Claude Debussy lived and I am sure you will draw your own conclusions from the association.

Fortunately, we live today in a time of freedom, made possible by men and women of the past who nurtured a utopian dream. I point to the writings of one of these great people, Jan Amos Comenius, patron of UNESCO and a supporter of the Rosicrucian movement in Europe, whose work reconnects us with the opening words of this article.

Modern education is still influenced by Comenius’s original guiding principles, and these certainly help people to “learn to do” and “learn to know.” Sadly, few are today interested in “learning to live together” and “learning to be.” Cultural and human poverty, often so widespread, clearly demonstrates this.

Furthermore, we live in an era of our human history where the transcendent has been almost entirely removed from our lives. Although this may reassure some scientists who base even their most private moments purely on things that can be seen and measured, on the other hand,





The entrance to the Rosicrucian Research Library in San Jose, California.

it distances them from their true nature, producing the sad results we are witnessing today: a totally unbalanced rapport with the environment; a relationship between individuals which, even when all goes well, is more of a truce than a state of peace; and an incapacity to conceive and dream of a better future.

We believe that “learning to live together” and “learning to be” are exactly the things that a traditional initiatic order should be doing. To provide modern people with the appropriate environment and tools they need in order to develop this ability, people are empowered to become better, more mature human beings, capable of evolving and of grasping more profoundly the true meaning of life, namely to prepare oneself to become the architect of one’s own destiny.

Rosicrucianism holds fast to the value of education, in an etymological sense of the word; and it supports the quest for Beauty as a privileged route for reintegration with the Divine. Rosicrucians maintain that this quest is essential, especially in an age such as the present, where the illusion of happiness obtained exclusively through scientific and

technological progress without limits is fast failing.

We, Rosicrucians of the twenty-first century, are more than ever convinced that education can truly save humanity from its own entrapments. In an etymological sense of the word, education, as mentioned earlier, ensures that people discover within themselves true knowledge, recognizing in their fellow humans, as they recognize in themselves and the universe, Divine nature in action, expressing all the potentiality of the soul that manifests in all people.

We are children of the absolute and carry within us evidence of this inheritance. “We have rejected that which the beast within us wanted, and we want to find the Person wherever he may have been lost.” With these words, the French politician and writer André Malraux was emphasizing that the moment has arrived when new answers are needed, and these can only come from a renewed vision of reality. Rosicrucians believe that an initiatic order in particular, as with art in general, has the purpose of helping people to reach this new vision. Perhaps this is Utopia...? Certainly it is in her that we place all our hopes. Can we do otherwise?