

## **Freedom and Tolerance: An Essay on Ethical Principles in AMORC's Traditional Knowledge**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is an analysis of the motto of the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis (AMORC): "The greatest tolerance within the strictest independence." Its central meaning is studied as a part of Traditional Knowledge. The analysis focuses on philosophical principles that are understood in the light of some elements of the *corpus litterarum* of AMORC, focusing on publications from its leaders, known as imperators, while also looking for a transdisciplinary dialogue beyond the borders of the Order. It is concluded that the realization of the motto requires a complex process of self-development, and also that freedom is not doing what you want, but rather it is a right that involves responsibility for the construction of a better world for all.

Keywords: Rosicrucian, Traditional Knowledge, Transdisciplinarity, Ethics, Freedom, Tolerance

### **Liberté et tolérance: un essai sur les principes éthiques contenus dans la connaissance traditionnelle de l'amorc**

#### **Résumé**

Cet article consiste en une analyse de la devise de l'Ancien et Mystique Ordre Rosae Crucis (AMORC): "La plus grande tolérance dans la plus stricte indépendance". Sa signification principale est étudiée en tant qu'élément de la Connaissance Traditionnelle. L'analyse se concentre sur les principes philosophiques qui sont interprétés à la lumière de certains éléments du corpus litterarum de l'AMORC, notamment les publications de ses dirigeants, connus sous le nom d'Imperatores, tout en recherchant également un dialogue transdisciplinaire, au-delà des frontières de l'Ordre. La conclusion est que la réalisation de la devise requiert un processus complexe de développement personnel et que la liberté ne consiste pas à faire ce que l'on veut, mais qu'il s'agit plutôt d'un droit qui implique la responsabilité de la construction d'un monde meilleur pour nous tous.

Mots-clés: Rosicrucien(-ne), connaissance traditionnelle, transdisciplinarité, éthique, liberté, tolérance

### **Libertad y Tolerancia: Un Ensayo Sobre los Principios Éticos en el Conocimiento Tradicional de Amorc**

## **Resumen**

Este artículo es un análisis del lema de la Antigua y Mística Orden Rosae Crucis (AMORC): “La mayor tolerancia dentro de la más estricta independencia”. Su significado central se estudia como parte del Conocimiento Tradicional. El análisis se enfoca en principios filosóficos que se entienden a la luz de algunos elementos del corpus litterarum de AMORC, enfocándose en las publicaciones de sus líderes conocidos como imperators, buscando también un diálogo transdisciplinario más allá de las fronteras de la Orden. Se concluye que la realización del lema requiere de un complejo proceso de autodesarrollo y también que la libertad no es hacer lo que uno quiere, sino que es un derecho que implica responsabilidad en la construcción de un mundo mejor para todos.

Palabras Clave: Rosacruz, Conocimiento Tradicional, Transdisciplinariedad, Ética, Libertad, Tolerancia

## **Liberdade e tolerância: um ensaio sobre princípios éticos no conhecimento tradicional da AMORC**

### **Resumo**

Este artigo faz uma análise da divisa da Antiga e Mística Ordem Rosae Crucis (AMORC): "A mais ampla tolerância na mais irrestrita independência". Seu significado central é estudado como parte do Conhecimento Tradicional. A análise se concentra em princípios filosóficos que são entendidos à luz de alguns elementos do corpus litterarum da AMORC, com foco em publicações de seus líderes, conhecidos como Imperatores, ao mesmo tempo em que busca um diálogo transdisciplinar para além das fronteiras da Ordem. Conclui-se que a concretização do lema requer um processo complexo de autodesenvolvimento e também que liberdade não é fazer o que se quer, mas sim um direito que envolve a responsabilidade pela construção de um mundo melhor para todos.

Palavras-chave: Rosacruz, Conhecimento Tradicional, Transdisciplinaridade, Ética, Liberdade, Tolerância

## **Freiheit und Toleranz: eine Studie der ethischen Prinzipien in den traditionellen Lehren von AMORC**

### **Zusammenfassung**

In diesem Aufsatz wird das Motto des Alten und Mystischen Orden vom Rosenkreuz (AMORC): „Die höchste Toleranz in der striktesten Unabhängigkeit“ untersucht. Dieser Hauptsatz ist Teil des Studiums des Traditionellen Wissens. Die philosophischen Prinzipien werden im Rahmen einiger Elemente des Corpus Literarum von AMORC analysiert. Es sind Veröffentlichungen ihrer Leiter, auch Imperatoren genannt, die einen transdisziplinären Dialog über die Grenzen des Ordens suchen. Hieraus ergab sich, dass man dieses Motto nur verwirklichen kann wenn ein komplexer Prozess in der Persönlichkeitsentwicklung abgeschlossen wurde. Es folgerte weiterhin, dass Freiheit nicht

gleichgestellt ist mit „tun was man will“, sondern ein Recht und eine Verantwortung sind, eine bessere Welt für alle zu erschaffen.

Schlüsselworte: Rosenkreuzer, das Traditionelle Wissen, transdisziplinär, die Moral, Freiheit, Toleranz

## Introduction

According to the World Intellectual Property Organization: “Traditional Knowledge is knowledge, know-how, skills, and practices that are developed, sustained, and passed on from generation to generation within a community, often forming part of its cultural or spiritual identity.”

The Rosicrucian teachings are linked primarily to Western esotericism, but also to Eastern religions and thought as well as pagan and pantheistic views that tie in with human relations to nature. Because of this holistic or wholeness approach that is mainly practical, it can be classified as a Traditional Knowledge (TK).

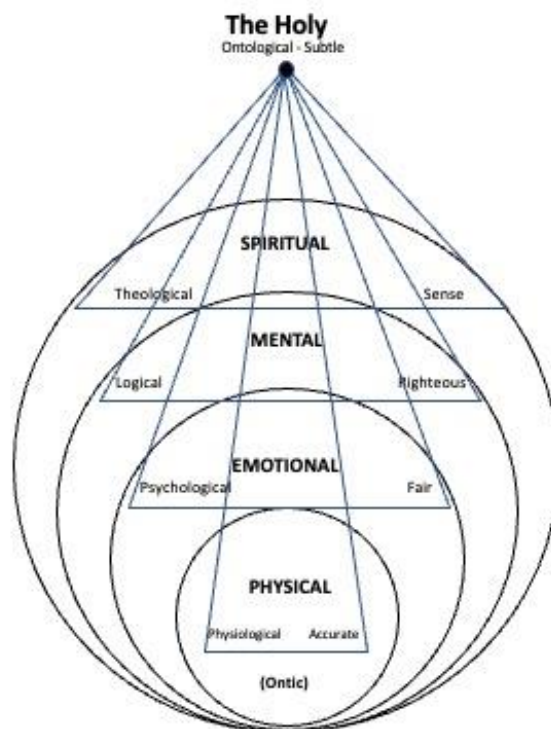


Figure 1. The Great Chain of Being. (All images by author.)

In this sense, Traditional Knowledge arises from a structure that gives it integrity, which Lovejoy (1964) called “The Great Chain of Being.” (See Figure 1). This structure has an irreducible, numinous dimension, in the sense described by Rudolf Otto (2010), and is able

to explain the different levels of reality, as the transdisciplinary approach does in the Charter of Transdisciplinarity, Article 2:

The recognition of the existence of different levels of reality governed by different types of logic is inherent in the transdisciplinary attitude. Any attempt to reduce reality to a single level governed by a single form of logic does not lie within the scope of Transdisciplinarity. (de Freitas 1994)

The United Nations University (UNU) has recognized the importance of Traditional Knowledge and its application in different fields of knowledge (UNU 2010), mapping areas where this type of knowledge is found. Thus, Traditional Knowledge has been legitimized as a complement to Scientific Knowledge and has been applied in different public policies across the planet.

Scientific Knowledge, which can be seen as hegemonic in Western culture, often classifies knowledge into four categories (1) Commonsense Knowledge, as superficial, sensitive, subjective, unsystematic knowledge; (2) Theological Knowledge (Religious), as an evaluative, inspirational knowledge – it is an “infallible” knowledge that contains explanations for everything; (3) Philosophical Knowledge, which seeks to separate mythical and religious explanations from those that are rational; and (4) Scientific Knowledge, which seeks to delimit a field of study around an object by applying a rigorous and specific method of study.

Therefore, we can approach knowledge from different angles. Transdisciplinary studies promote a dialogue between these different kinds of rationalities, since they foster zones of non-resistance that allow for an exchange between different types of knowledge. This paper uses a transdisciplinary approach to explore Rosicrucian knowledge through its motto: “The greatest tolerance within the strictest independence.”

We will explore this motto by studying the structure of the Traditional Knowledge of AMORC, then we will analyze the principles of Independence, expressed as Freedom, and of Tolerance, seeking transdisciplinary dialogue. Finally, in our conclusion, we will examine the reflective perspectives made possible by the adopted methodology.

## **1. The Essential Core of Traditional Knowledge in AMORC**

According to Christian Rebisse (2005), as a contemporary institution, the Ancient Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, AMORC, has its origin, in the beginning of the twentieth century with Harvey Spencer Lewis (1883-1939). However, the Order perpetuates a tradition originally attributed to the Mystery Schools of ancient Egypt. The modern historical origin of AMORC goes back to the publication of the Rosicrucian manifestos in the seventeenth century.

AMORC defines itself as a “Philosophical, initiatory, and traditional, non-religious and apolitical global movement, open to men and women of all races, religions, and social positions.”

Thus, AMORC defines itself along three dimensions: (1) An Initiatory Dimension; (2) A Philosophical Dimension; and (3) A Traditional Dimension.

From this statement, it is possible to outline two essential axes in the Traditional Knowledge conveyed by the organization. First, there is an axis that defines an initiatory process, which unfolds in rituals and in mystical experiments of a personal nature, experienced by members in their homes, in their Private Sanctum, and sometimes as a collective, experienced in the Temples of Affiliated Bodies (lodges). Also, a second axis is characterized by its philosophical nature that manifests in ethical principles adopted by members and in the organization’s relationship with society. Figure 2 illustrates these two axes.

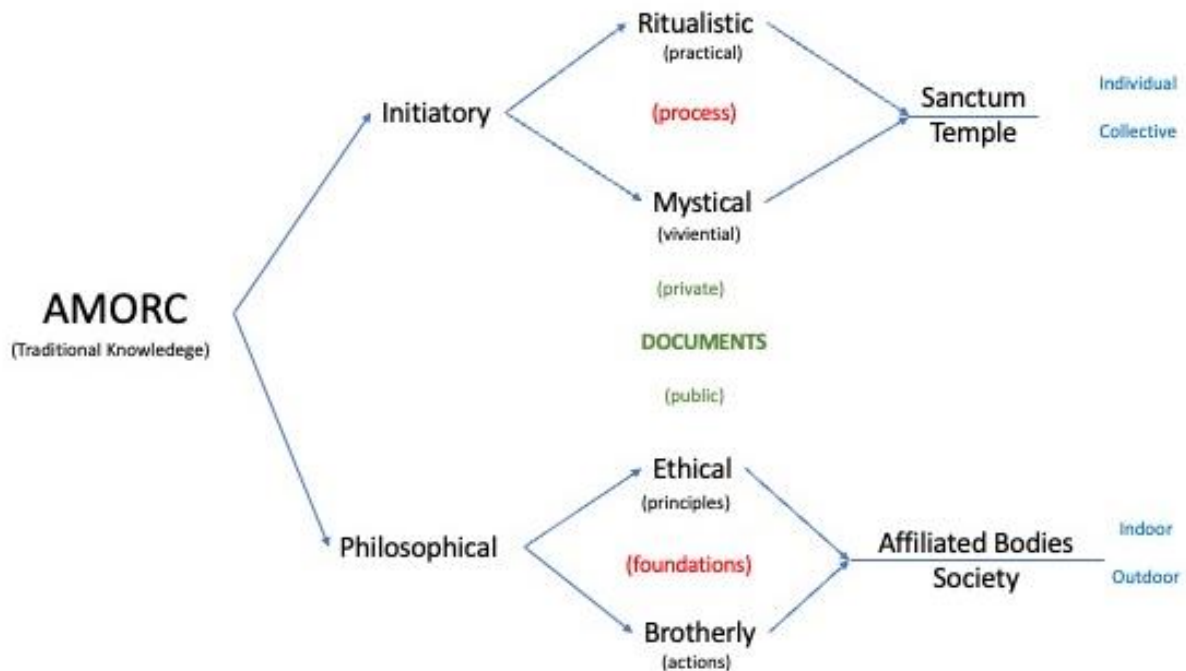


Figure 2. The Axes of AMORC’s Traditional Knowledge.

It is the philosophical foundations that primarily interest us in this discussion. These fundamentals are condensed in the Rosicrucian motto: “The greatest tolerance within the strictest independence.”

In the approach adopted for this paper, priority was given to the texts of its top leaders, traditionally known under the title of Emperor, as well as in the light of its public documents such as the *Code of Life* and the manifestos, among others.

## 2. Between Independence and Freedom: The Foundation of AMORC's Ethics

The words autonomy, freedom, and independence have been used as a concept in Western philosophy where they became “sacred things” (Smullen 2003).

Independence as a principle is a reflection of the growth of human consciousness, or human evolution. Since at least ancient Greece, there has been the freedom to think; this notion passed through time until the Universal Declaration of Human Rights enshrined the right to freedom.

A discourse on independence and freedom is a complex task, because these two concepts are deeply connected. People are by nature free; freedom is a fundamental right. Independence has its roots in freedom. But independence is more than freedom. It can be also a right, but its structure is more complex, because independence requires recognition – mainly the recognition of the Inner Master, as the Rosicrucians propose, but also the recognition of the autonomy of others.

In this sense, and in a comprehensive manner, it is possible to state that Rosicrucianism has always been guided by the value of freedom, and freedom provides independence.

Rebisse (2005), in his overview of Rosicrucianism throughout the ages, deduced in the reported counter-hegemonic movements, both with regard to the Egyptian tradition, as well as to historical Rosicrucianism, an approach to free-thinking and independence similar to current conventions.

From an historical point of view, the manifesto *Fama Fraternitatis* is unequivocal in its criticism of the Church's dictates on European society in the seventeenth century. The same approach was repeated with the *Positio Fraternitatis Rosae Crucis*, published by AMORC at the beginning of the twenty-first century (AMORC 2001), when it makes several criticisms of the metaphorical imprisonment of current society, for example, by pointing out the economic model that does not privilege the average person.

The *Rosicrucian Code of Life* in its 16<sup>th</sup> article states: “Be and remain a free thinker. Think for yourself and not according to what other people think. Likewise, let everyone think freely; do not impose your ideas on others and always remember that your ideas are also evolving.”

According to *AMORC's Glossary of Terms and Concepts of the Rosicrucian Tradition* (AMORC 2011, 163), the Order states that “freedom is a social right that human beings mutually grant or refuse. It essentially concerns the prerogatives attributed to every citizen living in a truly democratic society.”

Former Emperor Ralph M. Lewis (2022, 348) emphasized that “AMORC can pride itself on encouraging its members to be a free-thinkers.”

In another text, when discussing “The Alchemy of Life,” he states that a person has the right to freedom in a universal way; freedom should not be considered only in a personal way (Lewis 2022, 80-81).

From a spiritual point of view, the foundation of freedom in AMORC’s teachings has connections with free will.

Former Emperor Christian Bernard (2012, 29) wrote that he sees free will as a gift: “Free will is assuredly the most spiritual faculty that God has granted to human consciousness.” Free will implies the ability to know how to make choices, or how to be aware of the choices that are made all the time. This implies, as seen in the manifestos, a capacity for self-criticism. Thus, people can realize their mistakes to the point of freeing themselves from the “mental poisoning” in which they are (or can be) trapped. Thus, they can change, “evolve” (grow), as stated in the *Code of Life*.

However, making a true self-criticism, which allows the use of free will, is not simple. AMORC co-founder and former Emperor Harvey Spencer Lewis (1962, 16) stated that “the term free will is misunderstood by the majority. Unquestionably, the Cosmic urges us at times to do things just as in the material world.” Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish the use of freedom (free will) from a merely reactive action, be it motivated by an inner impulse (Cosmic) or an outer pressure (Social).

This is how the current Emperor of AMORC, Claudio Mazzucco, addressed freedom in his recently released book:

It is great to be a member of an organization that respects individual freedom[;] ... at the same time, it is necessary to remember that AMORC emphasizes that the responsibility for our actions is ours alone, and that it is precisely from the reflection on our experiences that the expansion of individual consciousness occurs.  
(Mazzucco 2022, 120)

In this way, self-criticism is a mediator of freedom, and must support the decision-making process, which implies responsibility. See Figure 3.

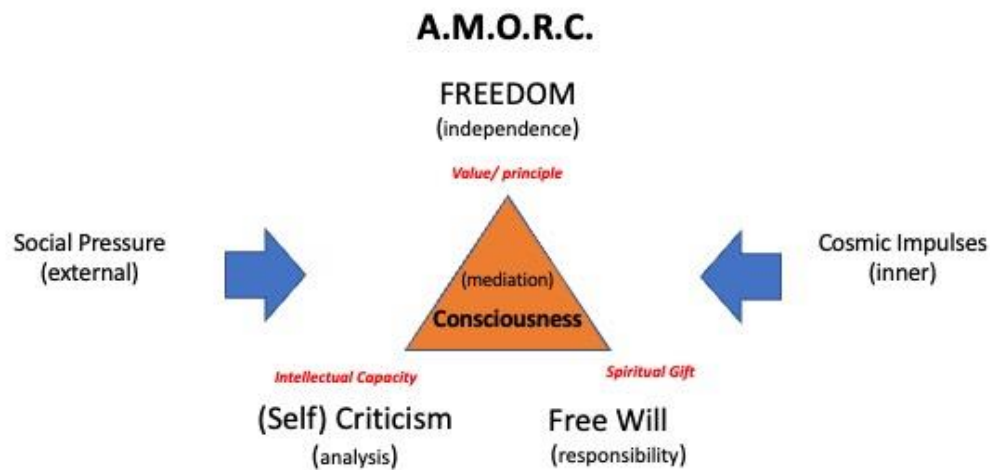


Figure 3. The Structure of Freedom in AMORC's Traditional Knowledge.

To seekers, AMORC declares its appreciation for freedom by stating in its publication *Mastery of Life*:

The Rosicrucian Order does not attempt to define the nature of the deity. Rather, you will remain free to discover this through your own reflections. This same approach applies to everything that is presented through the Rosicrucian teachings.... For several centuries, due to the lack of freedom of thought, the Order had to conceal itself under various names. However, in all times and places the Order never ceased its activities, perpetuating its ideals and its teachings, participating directly or indirectly in the advancement of the arts, sciences, and civilization in general, and always emphasizing the equality of men and women and the true solidarity of all humanity. (AMORC 2019, 3, 21)

The principle (or right) of freedom is one of the most important to humanity today. Thus, freedom is reaffirmed in some key documents. The most famous of which is the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UNESCO 1948), which relates to it in different articles. The *Charter of Transdisciplinarity* (UNESCO 1994), adopted at the First World Congress of Transdisciplinarity, Convento da Arrábida, Portugal (1994), is a document that establishes the foundations for the building of sustainable knowledge for the future of humanity. Based on respect for diversity of knowledge, this document does not mention freedom directly, but the whole document emphasizes the need to revise concepts, or express freedom of thought, in the same way as AMORC does.



### 3. The Principle of Tolerance

Since, in AMORC's Traditional Knowledge, the principle of freedom is a major base for individual ethics, the principle of tolerance is also a major part of Rosicrucian ethics, because it offers a balance to independence.

Since we live in societies that require cooperation, it is essential to understand that there are limits to independence, and tolerance is, therefore, a very important limit that offers a balance to the use of freedom.

In the *Positio Fraternitatis Rosae Crucis*, tolerance is addressed in terms of an increasingly globalized society, where there are many versions of reality. Thus, the Order affirms the principle of tolerance as the one that will help humanity carry out an historic transition that will promote a regeneration of the human being. For this reason, it states: "the virtue we cherish the most is tolerance – in other words, the right to differ" (AMORC 2001, 25).

In the *Appellatio Fraternitatis Rosae Crucis*, there are numerous references to tolerance. The document states that tolerance is a virtue of the Soul. In this sense, it could be seen, as Bernard did with free will, as a Cosmic gift. The *Appellatio* states: "A humanist worthy of the name respects all differences, providing, of course, they do not undermine each other's dignity or integrity. In other words, one shows tolerance and does not behave as if one were or felt superior" (AMORC 2014, 13).

Like freedom, tolerance is also reflected in the *Rosicrucian Code of Life*, Article 8: "Be tolerant and defend the right to be different. Never use the faculty of judgment to blame or condemn anyone, for you cannot read the hearts and souls of others. Look at them benevolently and leniently, and see what is best in them."

As can be seen, tolerance is supported by benevolence and lenience, because it is very easy to confuse it with its antonym, as Bernard states: "The word tolerance is sometimes misused to expressly and skillfully justify any form of intolerance.... [People] who [are] content to 'tolerate' ... [consider themselves] superior to what has been 'tolerated'" (Bernard 1989, 53).

This position is corroborated by Claudio Mazzucco (2020, 64), who states:

Many confuse tolerance with support; they think that tolerating means going through inner suffering, with the sacrifice of their thoughts and aspirations for the benefit of those who are usurping their right. But that triggers an inner feeling of aggression, of defending the territory, which keeps us away from the practice of tolerance.

This difficulty in understanding tolerance explains the reason that in the *Rosicrucian Code of Life* it is supported by benevolence and lenience. This is because being tolerant is a fundamental capacity to have, if there is to be true equity in a fraternity. Equality is therefore a virtue that helps to sustain tolerance.

H. Spencer Lewis became enchanted with the environment of equality created by the AMORC fraternity at the beginning of the twentieth century, in a time of intense segregation, and in the cradle of two world wars. As he said, in his text “True Equality” (2009, 64):

Our Order has members of every social position and financial standing. I have been particularly pleased to see how comfortably and contentedly men and women who are bank presidents, physicians, railroad directors, or presidents of colleges or universities can sit in our lodge room side by side with those who are workers in the trades or otherwise socially undistinguished.

His son and successor, Ralph M. Lewis, whose administration took place during the Second World War and the Cold War period, wrote much about equality, including in his article “The Condition of Peace.” For example, he observed the need for equality between nations as a condition for world peace.

From an historical point of view, tolerance is a concept that evolved much more recently than freedom. For example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, offers a single mention of tolerance, when stating that education should promote tolerance (Art. XXVI). As for the Charter of Transdisciplinarity, adopted in 1994, tolerance is affirmed as a central point when considering the keys to transdisciplinary thinking. Thus, the need arises to broaden the understanding of tolerance to elements that transcend those already mentioned.

Tolerance has deep roots in three skills (attitudes) that were described by the American psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) when explaining the bases of his Person-Centered Approach (PCA), which are: congruence, unconditional positive regard, and empathy. See Figure 4.

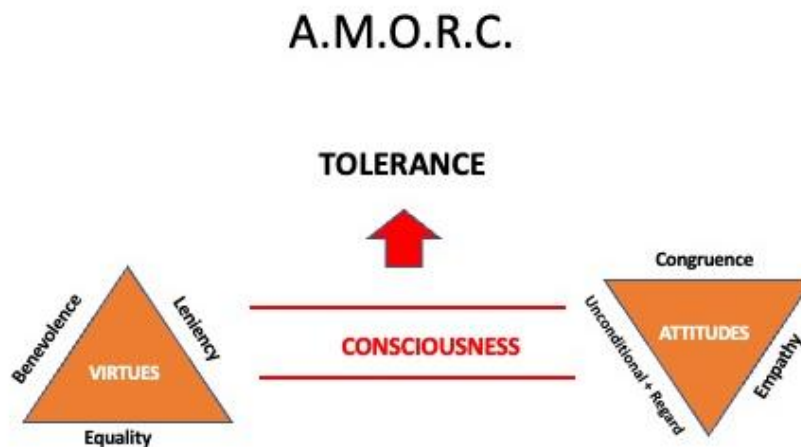


Figure 4. The Structure of Tolerance in AMORC’s Traditional Knowledge.

In this sense, being tolerant is being congruent with oneself, that is, realizing that each person is unique and, therefore, totally different from others; at the same time, to be tolerant

is to consider the other in a positive and unconditional way, that is, being that the other is totally different from one's self, he or she deserves all our consideration unconditionally. In other words, we need to accept others as they are and have a genuine interest in getting to know them while respecting them. For this level of acceptance, we need to be empathetic, that is, we need to be able to put ourselves in others' shoes, to feel how they place themselves in life.

## Conclusion

For some, it is not easy to be a member of the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis and abide by its motto: "The greatest tolerance within the strictest independence." It involves actions both in the inner environment of the fraternity, in the Lodge, and in life in general.

Thus, the realization of the motto requires a complex process of self-development. It involves self-criticism, in which members alone, in front of the mirror of their own consciousness, in the solitude of their private Sanctum, in periods of interiorization and meditation, evaluate their behavior.

In this process, the Inner Master (the Self) is persuaded to announce itself. In this way, the choices, the decision-making process, and judgments are guided by the ethical-fraternal principles proposed by AMORC. This should be the most appropriate way to understand the use of free will, between internal and external impulses.

Therefore, freedom is not doing what we want, but rather a right, a duty, a virtue, that involves responsibility, conscious action, a contribution to coexistence, and the construction of a better, fairer, more dignified world (and a fraternity) for all. This way, tolerance becomes a compass that guides conduct, especially in the use of freedom.

## Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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