

KNIGHT ROSE CROIX (18°)

PERSONAL ESSAY

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Write an essay on what you think is the central aspect of the quest being presented in each of the degrees from Secret Master to Knight Rose Croix.

Dante was halfway through life's journey when he began a journey through the circles of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise to embrace the Beatific Vision of Deity in his much-revered literary classic *The Divine Comedy*. Being middle-aged suggests that Dante had enough life experience under his belt already that he could appreciate the significance of his undertaking, while also presumably being young enough that he had ample opportunity left to apply the lessons from this journey to the remainder of his life.

Similarly, it is appropriate that this assignment comes halfway in my progression through the Scottish Rite Degrees. I have experienced fifteen degrees, from Secret Master to Knight Rose Croix, and there are fourteen more degrees before I may consider myself a Master of the Royal Secret. This assignment causes me to look back whence I came and gives me both hope for reaching the end as well as the faith needed to get there.

Dante did not travel alone, but was guided through his divine journey with assistance from the angelic Virgil. Similarly, my Masonic journey has not been solitary, for I have been guided with assistance from Adepts of the College of the Consistory. It was in January 2008, as I opened a new issue of the *Scottish Rite Journal*, when I first learned of this wonderful program. It is housed in Guthrie, and that name rang a bell as I remembered my first frantic reunion weekend. A cacophony of degrees were conferred and communicated, there was rushing here and there, group photographs were taken, and a sumptuous banquet was devoured. Those who presented the weekend apologized repeatedly that this was not how "Guthrie did it" and that sometime I should undertake a "pilgrimage to Guthrie." Now, in applying to the College of the Consistory, I thought this was my first opportunity to peek in at "Guthrie." I have not been disappointed.

The College of the Consistory breaks the frantic frenzy of a reunion weekend into piecemeal bites, one Scottish Rite degree at a time, with each degree working in conjunction with all the prior degrees to bring us closer unto our ultimate destiny with Deity. How that occurs is perhaps best explained in the words of Former Sovereign Grand Commander C. Fred Kleinknecht, 33°, who once described the degrees thusly:

We have sought, not to teach men the truth, but rather a way to the truth. Each must find it for himself. We seek only to be a guide – teaching the common ground of various philosophical and religious approaches to

belief in order that men might be more united in their standards of right and wrong and their understanding of the reality of God.¹

With that instruction in mind, I undertook the College of the Consistory program with a great deal of curiosity and excitement. I confess that I had not begun to grasp all that the University of Freemasonry had imparted to me on that first reunion weekend, and honestly I was still missing some of the intricacies whenever I attended subsequent reunion weekends. This was not a criticism of the ritual team in my Valley, but more of an agonizing awareness that there were myriad layers to this Masonic onion that would take me a lifetime – if not longer, to peel. The College of the Consistory Program would permit me to peel a layer here and a layer there at my own pace, without the added energies of attending a reunion weekend in person. My life since January 2008 has been one long, uninterrupted reunion weekend, for which I am deeply grateful.

As I explore the fifteen degrees of the Lodge of Perfection and Chapter Rose Croix all over again, my quest has been to discover what Brother Fred described as a search for what I already know as right from wrong, illuminated by the light of Divine Truth. Knowing right from wrong is not enough, though. The University of Freemasonry is not a lecture hall, but a laboratory of scientific exploration. Knowledge for its own sake is merely preparatory to action: doing right and avoiding wrong under the auspices of Deity. The higher purpose of my life is intended to be one constant program of concentrated action, of performing the duty I owe to Deity, my family and all my neighbors.

The Ineffable Degrees have caused me to broaden my awareness, set aside my preconceptions, and behold the wonders of Deity in poetic wonder, as I entered a Masonic novitiate of sorts dedicated to the principles of divine progression:

- In the Fourth Degree, the silence practiced by a Secret Master is an exercise of obedience and fidelity. The Lost Word resonates within me but I will not know it until I quiet myself, mourn what I have lost, and strive to perform my duty cheerfully as it is assigned to me. I have entered the sanctity of the *summum silentium* within the cloistered novitiate walls.
- In the Fifth Degree, the certainty of death that faces every Perfect Master causes me to measure my fleeting life by the good deeds I perform. I must be prepared for every eventuality, which includes providing the necessities of life for my family and loved ones. The novitiate picks up intensity as I assume more responsibility for my own development.
- In the Sixth Degree, my zeal and fidelity to duty are rewarded as an Intimate Secretary. It is important to be a peacemaker, finding ways to unite people and act as civilly as possible. The novitiate is not an isolated hermetical experience

¹ Rex R. Hutchins, *A Bridge to Light* (Washington, D.C.: The Supreme Council, 33°, S.J., U.S.A., 2nd ed. 1995), p. vii.

intended just for me; it is a communal cenobitic experience that I must share with others.

- In the Seventh Degree, my integrity as a Provost and Judge compels me to be just in evaluating others' actions because all actions have consequences. An essential part of any novitiate is the chapter of charity, where the brethren give and receive counsel on moral concerns.
- In the Eighth Degree, my benevolence and charity are required of an Intendant of the Building. Service to others entails teaching them eternal truth with sobriety, temperance, punctuality and industry. The novitiate is not for my own benefit; it prepares me to perform ministry humbly in the name of Deity.
- In the Ninth Degree, my vigilance for the interests and honor of others as an Elu of the Nine necessitates that we enlighten our souls and minds on eternal matters. The novitiate experience becomes more authentic as I am initiated further into unspoken ancient truths.
- In the Tenth Degree, my tolerance and liberalism as an Elu of the Fifteen inures me against the tyranny and despotism that sadly are so prevalent in our society. I am engaged in a war against fanaticism and persecution, and my life is dedicated overcoming assassins of the *summum bonum*. The novitiate is a counter-culture enterprise against all that is wrong and evil.
- In the Eleventh Degree, I am earnest, true and reliable as an Elu of the Twelve (aka Prince Ameth). To be a champion of the people requires hard work that is never completed. The novitiate is not dedicated solely to fostering an ambiance of tranquil meditation. It is also a dynamic process that transforms its members into catalysts of social change.
- In the Twelfth Degree, I have a new opportunity to build a just society as a Master Architect. Divine wisdom yields more dividends than material riches, including honor, discretion and understanding. My novitiate is no longer confined to the cloister as I venture forth to preach a Divine message to the outside world.
- In the Thirteenth Degree, I am not a person but a place – the Royal Arch of Solomon, where I descend into a fabled past to retrieve a sacred treasure from *illo tempore*. Moral character is a premium that is forged over a lifetime. The novitiate is nearing its end as I prepare to take my solemn vows in the presence of Deity.
- In the Fourteenth and final Degree, I complete my novitiate and am now a Perfect Elu. My life is dedicated to assisting, encouraging and defending my brethren, whethersoever dispersed. I am someone who is both bound and free: bound by my obligations and free from all prejudice, intolerance and envy.

Deity is perfection, and an intrinsic part of my Masonic journey through the Ineffable Degrees was to become like unto Deity in my pursuit of perfection. As I traveled through these Degrees, I sought only that which is noble, just and holy. Whatever is damaging and unsavory, no matter how attractive it might seem in poor artificial light, must be rejected at all costs. Deity is dedicated to the salvation of the entire world; becoming like unto Deity meant that I must collaborate in promulgating the renewal of all persons everywhere.

As I stepped outside the cloister walls, I found myself now engaged anxiously in the pursuit of Capitular work. The silence and learning of the novitiate were replaced with the hectic bustle of the real world, but that was okay because I was taking my interior monastic cell with me in these new travels:

- In the Fifteenth Degree, I joined in rebuilding that which was destroyed around us in my new capacity as a Knight of the East, of the Sword or of the Eagle. I was still faithful to trust, honor and duty, and I persevered despite difficulties and discouragements. Life can be very difficult but it is not impossible as I crossed the bridge and resumed my work armed with a trowel and sword.
- In the Sixteenth Degree, I directed and aided those who labor to rebuild our special connections with Deity in my role as Prince of Jerusalem. To do so, I necessarily kept faith in the justice and benevolence of Deity, and pressed forward with hope for the persecuted and oppressed. This work may reflect more about the strength of my character than the quality of our results, but that is my Masonic legacy.
- In the Seventeenth Degree, I sought out spiritual truths unencumbered by the confines of sectarian dogmatism as a Knight of the East and West. Drawing upon what I gained in my prior novitiate, I worked, reflected and prayed in the arid desert of my spirit. This was an unsettling moment as I struggled to uncover the plain and precious eternal truths that lie hidden in allegories and symbols.
- In the Eighteenth and final Degree, I was confronted with the frightening paradox of good and evil in my new hard-earned position as a Knight Rose Croix. I could prevail only to the extent that I had faith in the intrinsic goodness of Deity, humanity and myself: goodness surely will triumph over evil and all of us will advance into the hereafter.

I have always been an optimist but I did not know it until now. Continued optimism will be the key to obtaining my eventual status as a Master of the Royal Secret. Dante resumed his life journey after reaching the highest level of Paradise. I will do the same as I move into the Council of Kadosh, to find the “Holiness to the Lord” that is the new hallmark of my life no matter where I go.

The central aspect of my quest to date has been to become like unto Deity, not only knowing right from wrong, but actively doing good and avoiding evil. This is a multi-

layered onion, and I am only beginning to peel the first layers away. Unlike an artichoke where the prize is uncovering the heart of palm, peeling the layers of an onion is its own reward for there is nothing but the layers. So too, as a faithful Mason I perform my duty joyfully and with a clear conscience for its own sake, for it is the right thing to do. May I never stop in this eternal pursuit to become like unto Deity.