



A GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING THE GREAT PRIORY OF AMERICA

RECTIFIED SCOTTISH RITE REGIME

A HANDOUT TO ASSIST THE VOTING DELEGATES OF THE 68th TRIENNIAL

Understanding the State of the Rectified Scottish Rite and the Great Priory of America

The Rectified Scottish Rite (RER), also known as the Order of Beneficent Knights of the Holy City (in French: Chevalier Bienfaisant de la Cité Sainte or CBCS) is a Christian masonic rite developed in Lyon, France in 1778. This Order grew from the Rite of Strict Observance, a chivalric masonic rite that started in Germany and spread in popularity and practice across Europe. Reforms introduced by French mason Jean-Baptiste Willermoz in 1778, combined several initiatory and philosophical systems that lead to the birth of the Rectified Scottish Rite. Today, there are regular Great Priories of the RER that exist in Switzerland, the United States, France, England, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Togo, Italy, Austria and Benin.

The RER was first attempted to be cultivated in the United States in the 1800's by Robert Folger, followed in the early 1900's by a Belgian dentist, musician and freemason named Eduoard Blitz. Both Folger and Blitz were unable to sustain success. The Great Priory of America of the RER was chartered and established in 1934 by authority of the Grand Prieure Independant d'Helvétie to William Moseley Brown and John Raymond Shute II. Since that time, the Great Priory has promulgated its presence as the sovereign body governing the masonic Scottish Rectified Rite in the United States.

A strong methodology was used to maintain its membership and exclusivity. The body existed as an invitational body comprised of a highly restricted subset of American masonic leaders. For the purposes of this audience, it should be noted that Past Great Priors of the Great Priory of America have included Ned Dull, Kenneth Johnson, Marvin Fowler, James Ward and William Thornley, Jr. among others.

As a Rite rooted in Christian esotericism, there is a simple doctrine that is expressed to our membership. "The only rule of spirituality is unconditional love". As such the ultimate challenge of spirituality lies in our personal mission to just become what we are. Our members are charged to reflect on the spiritual development of man and adhere to the principles of love and beneficence.

The GPA's organizational structure consists of Scottish Masters Lodges of St. Andrew, headed by a Deputy Master and a chivalric Interior Order that includes the class of Squire Novices and that of the Beneficent Knights of the Holy City. These are organized into Prefectures and chaired by a Prefect.

When *Templar Swords Clash* by Brother James Marples¹ highlights a period of discord during the early stages of growth in the United States of America of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite and the masonic Knights Templar organization. As with all typical masonic drama, it boiled down to a few key components: strong personalities with inflated egos and their ability to gather support to a particular side of the argument.

Between 1866-1867, Albert Pike, in a zeal to expand the Scottish Rite, ran afoul of George Frank Gauley who preferred that the Scottish Rite degrees and specifically those in the Council of Kadosh (or Consistory for the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction) be only conferred on those who were already members of the Knights Templar. Why? Gauley felt access to the higher Scottish Rite degrees should be kept 100% chivalric to minimize the exposure to words and signs by those who have not yet received the templar degrees.

In effect, he advocated for a purity test that would only be attained by a requirement of membership in masonic templary. This might seem a bit peculiar to most modern-day masons, as there is a general understanding that the Scottish Rite does not require a specific religious test for membership. In fact, the colloquialism often heard is that the Scottish Rite is the College of Freemasonry which is not synonymous with the overtly Christian order of the masonic Knights Templar.

An examination of the Scottish Rite ritual reveals interesting details as several of the degrees are **chivalric**. For example, there is the **Knight of the Rose Croix**, and in the Consistory (where candidates are called **Knights Aspirant**), **Knight Commander of the Temple**, **Knight of the Sun**, **Scottish Knight of St. Andrew**, and **Knights Kadosh**, the latter of which references the legend of Jacques DeMolay. The degree of Knight Kadosh or the Knight of the Black and White Eagle was widely practiced throughout France in the 18th century in the early Ecosais or Scottish grades. It appears as the twenty-fourth degree in the Francken Manuscript² which detailed Etienne Morin's twenty-five degree Rite of Perfection.

Pierre Normand, Jr writes: "Demonstrative of the Templar nature of the [Ancient & Accepted Scottish] Rite, the six highest and last degrees of the Rite, [omitting the recent revisions of the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction degrees], are all Knight Templar degrees, more than in any other regular rite of Freemasonry... [with] the colorful history of the Knights Templar [serving as] a treasured part of the ritual of

¹ J. Marples. *When Templar Swords Clash*. Knight Templar Magazine. Vol LIV, No. 6 & 7, June-July 2008

² The 1783 Francken Manuscript. Supreme Council AASR for the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction, 2017

the [Knight Kadosh] Degree.”³ Here Brother Normand utilizes a frequent oversimplification of the term knights templar as being synonymous with chivalric and not to mean that they are the identical templar degrees contained in the Grand Encampment rituals.

This is an important distinction because employing basic logic, it is easy to assume that one must be a member of the masonic Knights Templar before becoming a member of other groups that also use templar symbology or motif. Taking this a step further, one might also suggest that the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar is the sole authority governing all templar orders in the geographic area that it claims as its jurisdiction. However, such a basic understanding would be flawed on many historical, factual and practical accounts.

The Order of Poor Fellow-Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon, commonly known as the Knights Templar, was founded in 1119 by Hugo de Payens and Geoffrey of St. Omer. It emerged as an association of monk-soldiers living by a monastic rule but also protecting Christian pilgrims. It is important to note that Middle Ages had two ideals, the monk and the soldier. The monk was the spiritual, and the soldier was the military hero. The military-monkish orders, whose members were both monks and soldiers, represented a fusion of these two ideals. Though the knights were sworn to live lives of poverty, the order grew in popularity and received much charity after it was officially recognized by the Catholic Church in 1128 until Pope Clement V disbanded the order in 1312.⁴

There is no order in present day society that can trace a proven lineage to the original Knight Templars. There are a number of orders that claim to represent the spirit of the crusades through a romanticized lens of templary. Templar imitation is enduringly popular but seldom historically literate.⁵ Legitimate chivalric orders usually differ from self-styled orders of chivalry originating from private organizations. The distinguishing mark is connection to a fons honorum. Fons Honorum or “fountains of honor” are the persons and entities that hold the exclusive prerogative of bestowing titles of nobility and honors legally as subjects of international law.

³ P. Normand, Jr. *Templar Degrees of the Scottish Rite*. The SRRS Plumblin. Fall 2008

⁴ O.J. Thatcher, E. Holmes McNeal. *A Source Book for Mediæval History: Selected Documents Illustrating the History of Europe in the Middle Age* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 492-494.

⁵ D. Jones. Meet the Americans Following in the Footsteps of the Knights Templar. *The Smithsonian Magazine*. July/August 2018. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/meet-americans-following-footsteps-knights-templar-180969344/>

There are several modern revivalist knight templar themed orders that exist in the United States:

- Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem,
- Knights Templar of America,
- OPCCTS - The Knights Templar of North America,
- Order of Malta - Federal Association USA,
- Sovereign Order of St. John of Jerusalem - Knights Hospitaller,
- Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of Saint-John of Jerusalem,
- Modern Order of Saint Lazarus,
- Religious and Military Order of Knights of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem,
- Order of Saint Ignatius of Antioch

This non-exhaustive list of groups is clearly not masonic however their outward appearance and dress are sufficient to cloud the understanding and perception of the casual observer.



There also exists a treaty with the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar USA, Prince Hall Affiliated which confers its own set of identical masonic templar orders.



Additionally, the existence of numerous unrecognized masonic templar groups across the US claiming to be masonic, begs the question of how the sole authority doctrine can be consistently and equitably enforced.



Secondly within the masonic world, the Grand Encampment has jurisdiction only over the degrees that it confers which are the **Order of the Red Cross, the Order of Malta and the Order of the Temple**. The preamble to the statutes and constitutions of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar USA clearly state: “*We, the Knights Templar of the United States, in order to secure unity and better government and to increase the prosperity and influence of Templary, which is declared to comprise of the Orders of Christian Knighthood known as **Red Cross, Knight of Malta and Knight Templar**, do ordain and establish this constitution.*”

Section Three which details its Jurisdiction and Power further state, “*It has supreme legislative, judicial and executive power and jurisdiction over the **Orders of Red Cross, Knight of Malta and Knight Templar** within the United States of America and geographical regions over which the United States exercises jurisdiction.*”⁶

In an effort to illustrate how the various masonic chivalric orders do not fall under the sole authority of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar in the United States, a review of a number of them will be necessary.

Royal Order of Scotland⁷

The Royal Order comprises two Degrees, that of Heredom of Kilwinning and that of the Rosy Cross. Documentary evidence exists in its archives indicating this Order was active as early as 1741. The Rosy Cross Degree, tradition takes its origin on the field of Bannockburn, on Summer St. John’s Day 1314, and was instituted by King Robert the Bruce, who having in the course of the battle for Scottish independence,



⁶ The Constitution, Statutes, Disciplinary Rules, Standing Resolutions, Ceremonies, Forms and Approved Decisions of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America, 2019 Edition

⁷ The Royal Order of Scotland Provincial Grand Lodge of USA. <https://roosusa.org>

received assistance from a body of sixty-three knights who may have been original Knights Templar and Freemasons. He conferred upon them as a reward for their services the civil rank of Knighthood. The Degree of Knighthood can only be conferred in the Grand Lodge of the Royal Order, which has its seat in Edinburgh, or by special authority by a Provincial Grand Master or his deputy. The order is governed in the United States by the Provincial Grand Lodge, USA of the Royal Order of Scotland.

Order of Knight Masons⁸

The Order of Knight Masons is a sovereign chivalric masonic order founded in 1923 with control of the ancient Irish degrees known as the Red Cross or Babylonian Degrees. These ancient Irish Degrees of Knight Masonry center on a theme of the building of the second Temple. It is a system of three degrees, namely the Red Cross of Daniel or the Babylonian Pass referred to as Knight of the Sword, the Jordan Pass referred to as Knight of the East, and the Royal Order referred to as Knight of the East and West. In the United States, it is governed by the Grand Council of Knight Masons, USA.



The Masonic and Military Order of the Red Cross of Constantine⁹

This Christian masonic order consists of a total of five degrees starting with Knight-Companion of the Red Cross of Constantine. In separate ceremonies the Knight-Companion builds on what he has already been taught and in the ceremony of the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre and St. John the Evangelist this knowledge is further expanded and the ultimate aims of Freemasonry are revealed. The earliest documented date of the order in its present form is 1865. The governing body of the order for the United States of America is the United Grand Imperial Council of Knights of the Red Cross of Constantine and Appendant Orders for the United States of America, Mexico and the Philippines.



Royal Order of Masonic Knights of the Scarlet Cord¹⁰

The Royal Order of the Masonic Knights of the Scarlet Cord was originally founded in 1889 but went dormant in 1929 until it was revived as part of the Order of the Secret Monitor or Brotherhood of David and Jonathan in 2010. There are 6 grades in system (Ostiaarii, Lectors, Fellows, members of the Court of Assistants, High Priests, Knights) where the member is able to advance progressively. This order is housed



⁸ The Grand Council of Knight Masons. <http://www.knight-masons.com>

⁹ The Red Cross of Constantine. <http://www.redcrossconstantine.org>

¹⁰ The Scarlet Cord. <https://www.sc-middx.org.uk/about/history-of-the-order/>

under the auspices of the Grand Council of the Allied Masonic Degrees of the United States of America.

Scottish Rectified Rite or Chevaliers Bienfaisants de la Cité Sainte¹¹

The Scottish Rectified Rite is a masonic and chivalrous Christian order established in France in the 18th century. It was developed in 1778 by Jean Baptist Willermoz, influenced from the esoteric Christian philosophy of Martines de Pasqually, Louis-Claude de Saint-Martin using reforms to Baron von Hund's 1751 German chivalric Rite of Strict Observance. The Scottish Rectified Rite consists of the degrees of Scottish Master, Perfect Master of St. Andrew, Squire Novice and Knight Beneficent of the Holy City. In the United States of America, this Order is governed by the Great Priory of America, CBCS.



Royal Order of the Red Branch of Eri¹²

The legend of this Knightly Order states that it was founded in 1697 BC by the King of Ireland where it was comprised of four groups: Ollamhs (teachers and knight hospitallers); Brehons (judges); Crimthears (priests); and the Bards (historians and record keepers). A lodge of this Order is called a Faslairt and is supposed to represent an armed camp in the field. The degrees conferred are Man-at-Arms, Esquire, Knight, Knight Commander and Grand Cross. In the American Allied Masonic Degrees, the Red Branch is an honorary degree conferred upon members for meritorious service.



Order of DeMolay¹³

The Order of DeMolay is not a masonic order but a group founded in 1919 for young men between the ages of 12 to 21. The name DeMolay was chosen as a nod to the group's masonic influences and to the Knights Templar Grand Master Jacques DeMolay's example of knighthood, chivalry, loyalty, courage, fidelity and toleration. The DeMolay initiation consists of two "degrees," the Initiatory Degree and the DeMolay Degree. Additionally, the Degree of Chevalier is the highest honor an Active DeMolay can receive.



Out of all of these previously listed groups, none of them confer the degrees of the Order of the Red Cross, the Order of Malta and the Order of the Temple.

¹¹ The Great Priory of America. <https://greatprioryofamerica.ipower.com>

¹² The Red Branch of Eri. <http://www.amdusa.org/degrees/RBE.html>

¹³ DeMolay International. <https://demolay.org/history/>

Therefore, it should be safe to say that the Grand Encampment of the Knights Templar USA does not have an issue with any of them. Unfortunately, it is clear that this interpretation of sole authority has not been unilaterally applied. Namely, the Scottish Rectified Rite appears to be at the epicenter of a clash of swords wielded by strong personalities with inflated egos and their ability to gather support to a particular side of the argument.

Whether it was a perception of a denial of membership of a leader of the Grand Encampment or the rapid GPA shutdown of an experiment in expanding the Scottish Rectified Rite access to a group looking to confer the rituals, the outcome was far more pronounced than the underlying cause. War erupted. The Grand Encampment under its leadership decided to create a competing Scottish Rectified Rite order called the Grand Priory of the Reformed and Rectified Rite of the USA.

When GEKT created its competing order, the rationale was: “The RER is a strictly Christian Order, and as such the requirements are to be a practicing Christian. There are ritualistic requirements which cannot be assumed by non-Christians. Further one needs to be a Knight Templar and a member of a Symbolic Lodge in fraternal accord with a Grand Lodge recognized by most of the members of the Conference of Grand Masters of North America. This requirement is automatically met by any Knight Templar belonging to a Commandery of Knights Templar here in the United States.”

Furthermore, the Grand Encampment claimed that the 1934 formation of the Great Priory of America “was then and is now a violation of Section 3 of the Constitution of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar. Section 3: It (GEKT) has supreme legislative, judicial, and executive power and jurisdiction over the Orders of Red Cross, Knight of Malta and Knight Templar within the United States of America and geographical regions over which the United States exercises jurisdiction.”

Additional steps were taken to declare a Decision that the “Great Priory of America CBCS is an unrecognized Templar Order operating within the United States of America, in direct conflict with Section 3 of the Constitution of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America. Accordingly, membership in the Great Priory of America CBCS is incompatible with membership in the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America and any Grand, Subordinate, or Constituent Commandery under its jurisdiction or owing allegiance to the same.”

Unlike the 1880's where Gouley and Pike traded sharply worded letters and proffered charges leading to suspensions and expulsions, this present day feud lead to the decisions to pull amity and recognition of the Grand Encampment by a number of Grand Lodges, a rebuke by the Conference of Grand Masters of North America, in addition to the Great Priory of England and Wales and lawsuits in US courts of law where men who once met in masonic lodges and other bodies were taking each other to seek justice from the judicial system while engaging in battles in the court of public opinion.

The caustic nature of this battle has placed masonic brother against brother and though the leadership has changed for each respective organization over time, the bile remains. As recently as January 2020, the Grand Encampment reprinted its decision which warned masonic Knights Templars that holding membership in the Great Priory of America will result in their expulsion.

Putting aside the saber rattling and ego driven cow tipping for a moment, it is evident that the Knights Templar and the CBCS are separate Orders with very different rituals and procedures. The rationale that membership in one is incompatible with the other is not driven by fact or by history, yet the divide grows. No one masonic group owns the usage of the word Knights. "I'm a Knight, He's a Knight, we are Knights, in fact they are all Knights!"

We are in the middle of a global pandemic where lives continue to be lost, where the masonic world has been impacted as much as every other society, industry and where our relevance and contribution to the basic aims of humanity need to be a beacon for hope, faith and love.

Louis E. Bartrand
Great Prior
Great Priory of America, CBCS

