

The Sacred Romance: A Reflection Paper

This student is always amazed by the things he discovers about himself through the spiritual formation assignments. The assignments begin as academic exercises and conclude as glimpses into the author's soul.

The experience this author had with *The Sacred Romance*, as well as with some of the other assigned readings, reminded him of a fictitious episode of deep sea diving. In the heart of the ocean, the amateur diver's eyes would be filled with brilliant colors and shapes he never knew existed. The sea creatures would be mesmerizing even though the diver would scarcely know the names of even a few of the curiosities. Some of the creatures would almost cry out to be touched while others would fill his heart with dread. The diver may also find the sea filled with murky clouds, bland shaded rocks, and debris from forgotten endeavors. Whether looking at the beauties of the sea or the monsters of the deep, the diver would have to remember to breathe patiently in order not to run out of oxygen. The trip to the bottom of the sea is similar to the voyage to the heart of the soul.

This author is fascinated by the majestic discoveries unknown previously, but cautious of the unknown beings hiding in the nooks and crannies of the mysterious floor. Reading *The Sacred Romance* helped this student confront issues that had been hidden in the cloudy corners of his heart.

The issue that the student discovered is a bit embarrassing to him because it seems juvenile. The workbook required readers to list childhood dreams. Like many boys, this author

had dreamed of being a professional baseball player. The dream is often a summertime desire for many young boys but, for this writer, it was one that consumed all of his seasons. As the student listed his dreams of adolescence, his mind was flooded with memories as he recounted the last day he played organized baseball.

When this student was twelve years old, he experienced the death of his father. Life for this author and his mother drastically changed. His father had been a minister and the family lived in a house owned by the church in a tiny Texas town. They had to move to a garage apartment and his mother started working as a receptionist. There had been no life insurance or savings so this writer and his mother pieced together money from social security and minimum wage jobs. This student continued his education but worked every day after school and most Saturdays.

This author's life had been filled with church events and baseball before his father's death. His father had been his little league coach and hours were spent practicing in the front yard, trading baseball cards, and dreaming of playing major league baseball. This student was confident he would one day play catcher for the New York Yankees. Competition in a small Panhandle town was scarce so this writer had no way to judge his ability beyond his extreme desire.

The number of young people who dream of being professional athletes is overwhelming. Only a miniscule number have the opportunity to live the dream. This author is cognizant of this fact as an adult but as a twelve year old, he believed he was good enough to be in select company.

The summer after this writer's father died meant changing baseball leagues. His small town had only one team for his age level with fifteen players to be chosen to represent the city. Thirty boys competed for the positions.

After a few weeks of practice, the coaches sat the boys on the bleachers to call out the names of the players who had made the team. The author was chosen, as he had expected, but, as the coach was calling out his name, he could also see his mother sitting in their sky blue Ford Granada, just beyond the home team dugout. The day he made the team was also the day he had to quit. This was the last time the student played on a baseball team.

This writer's mother was waiting in the parking area to take him to apply for a job as a sack boy at a grocery store. Baseball was just a game and the minimum wage job of hauling groceries to people's cars would help pay the rent and utilities.

There was no place for outward grieving about baseball. The author's mother spent her hours away from work and church on her bed crying. There was great loss and a sense of confusion as to the best direction for the future. The loss of her lifelong mate was overwhelming and for a few years she spent most evenings on her bed listening to cassette tapes of her husband's sermons so she could hear his voice.

The author intellectually knew a baseball career was nearly an impossible dream, even for the best athletes, so he never articulated his sense of loss. He was in pain from losing his father, and seeing his mother in depression took priority. Until preparing for this assignment, this student had not realized he had lost his present family structure and his future dream.

This author did not realize that the loss of this dream was still hiding in his heart. One of the arrows referred to by Curtis and Eldredge had unknowingly lodged in his heart. The heart was still functioning, but the blade was still embedded in the flesh. He was embarrassed as he

scribbled in the workbook that thoughts of childhood baseball were stirred. Now in middle age, the possibility of even playing church league softball has faded. He did not feel anger toward God or his parents but sensed that the chapter was never completed. Thirty years had passed and his heart still expected to play baseball someday. Trips to Minute Maid Park were fun but always brought moments of sadness as he relived the day on the bleachers and his mother's car in the distance.

This author realized that, while he had suppressed a childhood goal, God had reshaped the dream into something spiritually significant. God did not permit this author to play professional baseball but allowed him to be a spiritual confidant to a few Christians associated with professional baseball. This student did not understand that, as Curtis and Eldredge explained, God was writing a story with a baseball theme.

After moving to Houston, this student had the opportunity to be on the field while the Houston Astros warmed up before a game. A friend who is a journalist for a Christian publication invited this author to "watch him work." The opportunity to be on the field was a dream come true for a baseball fan, but developing a friendship with the future manager, Cecil Cooper, was much more than this student had imagined. After inviting Cooper to his church, a spiritual friendship developed. Since then, the bullpen catcher and one of the players have started attending the early service of the author's church on game days.

The student found himself last Sunday in an unusual role of dealing with spiritual matters on the Astros team. The player who had been attending, Jason Smith, was being demoted to the minor league. He was at a crossroads in his career and in the midst of divorce. He asked this author to spend time praying with him and helping him work through his anger toward the

manager, other personnel, and his wife. Career and family were falling apart. A common interest in baseball was the catalyst that encouraged the player to confide in this student.

The Astros have not played well this year and the manager, Cecil Cooper, has been rumored to be close to termination. This student will possibly have the opportunity to attend to the manager's spiritual needs if job loss is the outcome.

This student had not realized until struggling through the workbook that he had not only lost his father, but in a sense, lost a dream. Most players lose their dream because they eventually realize the competition is superior. This author was not able to learn in that manner. The loss of his father meant the loss of a hero, economic security, a stable mother, and a dream to play baseball. In the midst of his father's illness, the student had been able to escape to the baseball diamond.

Chesterton was quoted in the workbook as referring to life being like a riddle. This author had never realized that this portion of his life had been a riddle until reading that portion of Eldredge's workbook. The dream had never had proper closure. Eldredge helped this student realize that God had a greater plan for him. God took his love for baseball and allowed him to use it to become a spiritual mentor to some professional baseball players. Instead of having a temporary impact, God has put the student in a position to help some people eternally. God took the student's childhood love of baseball and used it in his manhood to shape a major chapter of his life story.

The love of baseball has also made this student a special friend to a family from his church considered to be potential buyers of the Astros. The conversations originally centered on baseball when the senior citizen couple occasionally invited this student to sit with them in the Diamond Club seating. Over the past few years, the ballgame conversations have now

transitioned to subjects such as dealing with the loss of a spouse, ways to become closer to God, ministries for comforting the afflicted, and other spiritual needs. Baseball has become the background noise for eternally significant conversations.

The reading for this assignment was like turning over another rock on the murky ocean floor. The process caused some anxiety, but the discovery was worth the tenuous moments of discovery. This student uncovered beautiful colors and hues that would have remained captive underneath the rock without an experience with *The Sacred Romance*.