

{xtypo_quote} Verba docent, exempla trahunt (Words teach, examples fill with enthusiasm)
{/xtypo_quote}

Every 30th of December is a commemoration day in the Philippines. Remembered is a martyr who died for the freedom of his country. Meanwhile, this man has been dead for 110 years. There is no doubt that his thoughts about reforms in the Spanish colonial administration, subsequently led to the Philippine revolution of 1896. It all began in his mind. No doubt, he was the architect of the Philippine independence two years later. Humble as he was, he surely would feel a certain pride to know that his name is attributed to ideas that counted in his time, and more so, today. His ideas, which are not strange to the common man, equally holds sway even to those who –to put it mildly– disagree for what they stand for. It has become a cachet. José Rizal was a thinker of the 19th century, but his thinking goes beyond his time. It is still pointing towards the future and guiding us now.

What is his truth? Every generation looking for answers to questions prevalent in their own time can lean on it. No doubt, Rizal was a visionary. Speaking of visionary, we give credit to Colonel Torres. Today as it was when he gathered them for the first time, Rizal's legions of admirers have turned him into an institution. Then always in their minds Rizal's words echo full of foreboding: "A life which is not consecrated to a great ideal is like a stone wasted in the fields never to become an edifice." There is nothing higher that anyone can accomplish for himself and humanity. Rizal himself has come close to this insight: that it is not enough to live wholeheartedly, but to live for something – for an ideal.

Asked about the Order of the Knights of Rizal (OKOR) many Filipinos mistake it to be a sectarian organization that refers to his name as well. Even regular members of the order seem not to know much about its chivalric reminiscences. However, it is of importance for them to be

able to evaluate such ramifications to preclude misleading the public and themselves. What makes the Knights of Rizal considered an order? How do the Knights of Rizal see themselves and how are they seen by others? On the annual anniversary of its Charter, it is worthwhile seeking for answers. Have those knights fulfilled the hopes that were evoked when it was passed, or are they still hoping to fulfill? All what they are and ought to be is about to be revisited since this Philippine institution is about to be federalized. We observe and what is observed, must be self-critical, no doubt. At every analysis reason must guide us. We not only owe it to ourselves but to the spirit of Rizal that the standards by which we are measured be met and maintained. They cannot be changed. However, there is a need to redefine our position to enable us to defend it.

History of a word The word “order” is of Latin origin. The Romans held *ordo* to mean an affiliation to a status like that of senators. Their members gained considerable prestige within society that proved to be useful in obtaining political power. The order is community. Their members are not necessarily related like a family but are bound together through the same rules and espouse the same ideas. Later the name that such a community bears was often transferred into a badge that signifies its existence in the public eye. Early religious orders came into being in the realm of the church. During the Middle Ages at the time of the Crusades, orders of knighthood and chivalry emerged during the campaigns. These orders also performed charitable endeavors. Notwithstanding frequent political changes, some of them attained high prestige and could secure significant influence under protection of monarchical rulers.

Editor’s Notes: The author, Sir Christoph S. Eberle, dedicates this essay to the Order of the Knights of Rizal on the occasion of the annual anniversary of its Charter – Republic Act 646 of the Philippines. Sir Christoph is one of the finest gentlemen of Germany and is a good friend of the Philippines.

Since the 1960s, the International Commission on Orders of Chivalry (ICOC) has formulated norms referring to heraldic jurisdiction. (1) Although it is a private association, it can claim expertise on international laws covering orders of chivalry. Essentially, its validity relies on the principle of *fons honorum*. Jurists understand this to be the privilege of a

sovereign to grant, accept or protect an order of chivalry, regardless of whether the sovereign has abdicated or not. Therefore, ruling or ex-ruling houses can, through dynastic tradition, legitimize such orders, whereby, by implication, aristocratic dignity is exclusively given to those in higher ranks. Otherwise, they fall into the category of merit orders or awards, when conferred by governments of republican states. Any sovereign who does not rule a traditional state anymore remains titular head of his chivalric orders in the style of a Grand Master.

Although they are legal successors to former monarchies, it is a consensus among jurists that their new governments cannot formally validate, by legislation, chivalric orders belonging to an abdicated sovereign. However, it remains the government's prerogative whether to tolerate or abolish such orders within its territorial sovereignty. A State may exercise its sovereign power to award decorations and orders of merit. On one hand, recognition by a state means nothing from a strictly chivalric point of view. Such recognition may only be in the context of legal forms under which an order of chivalry operates: as an organization, corporation or any kind of entity. A state cannot recognize chivalric orders but only orders of merit or awarding systems stemming from states, which withhold diplomatic relations. Currently, the only chivalric order with full diplomatic acceptance is the so-called Sovereign Military Order of Malta. Emperor Karl V. granted the island to the Knights Hospitalers as feudal property in 1530 and after the French under Napoleon I. took over the island in 1798, its headquarters moved to Rome. Since 1953, it is under the patronage of the Holy See, which clarified again its status as non-territorial sovereign. Worldwide this status is officially recognized by several governments.

The ICOC is cognizant of the existence of the OKOR. However, the latter is not quoted in the Commission's register, because it does not fulfill the criteria required for insertion. Apart from formal reasons this is also due to historic facts.

The Knights of Rizal: an order institution

The Philippines is a presidential republic, modeled similar to the political system of the United States of America. Section 31, Article VI of the Philippine Constitution prohibits the granting of titles of royalty and nobility. Hence, such titles are neither granted nor recognized by Philippine law. When a member of this order addresses another member and his wife with "Sir" or "Lady" be it in personal or in written communication, it is a way of expressing not just mutual respect but the dignity accorded to being member of the order regardless of the rank. They do so as heirs of ideals higher than they are. It is this kind of respect inherent which bestows fraternal relations. In this way and only within the order, members maintain the same courtesy that is given to an ambassador of a foreign country, when being addressed as "Excellency" in official capacity, although Knights of Rizal are not diplomatic representatives of the Philippines. Their role resembles that of an "ambassador of goodwill". Presently, the President or Congress does not have the power to give merit orders to individuals in the Order of the Knights of Rizal. There is no such Philippine Order of Merit or Knighthood such as the British Garter, the French Legion of Honor or others that come close to them. However, Philippine Republic Act 646, in effect, gave the Order de jure, a special status in the home country of Jose Rizal. This Charter endows to the Knights of Rizal as a "body corporate and politic" with well defined rights, objectives and sovereign powers like the bearing of a seal, the enactment and amendment of by-laws, provided however, that they do not run contrary to the laws of the Philippines. Although the Order is not a state entity, it enjoys state recognition. This means the state recognizes the insignia corresponding to its ranks. This recognition is unique in the sense that it allows members to wear their insignia together with Philippine and foreign decorations in the prescribed manner. For example, a Philippine diplomat who has been conferred the rank "Knight Commander of Rizal" (KCR) may wear his insignia in events that call for wearing of decorations.

The Knights of Rizal serve their order in five different degrees. They are valid in each Chapter worldwide and known, as follows:

1st Degree Knight of Rizal (KR)

2nd Degree Knight Officer of Rizal (KOR)

3rd Degree Knight Commander of Rizal (KCR)

4th Degree Knight Grand Officer of Rizal (KGOR)

5th Degree Knight Grand Cross of Rizal (KGCR)

This hierarchy of ranks follows international standards for the creation and conferment of orders of merit. A candidate, who has been deemed worthy of membership, is formally installed into the first degree. During such a ceremony, the candidate is regarded as regular member upon his solemn accolade. Later he is obliged as serving brother knight to maintain his “good standing” in the chapter he joined. He may rise to higher degrees when having complied with respective requirements. They are, in particular, laid down by the Supreme Council, which acts as the highest governing body of the order. Each rank implies honor, duties and responsibility. These formalities are emphasized in each of the exaltation rituals. Such ranks are bestowed by the Supreme Council and are not likened to State awards given by Presidents or by Royal families of foreign countries where Chapters of the order have been established. The recently ratified by-laws further provide the Supreme Council with the privilege to award individuals with an honorary membership of every rank. Notably, based on the order’s constitution and by-laws, a member can be “any person of legal age and good moral character and reputation who believes in Rizal and is willing to learn more about him and follows his teaching” (Art. IV, Sec. 1). However, any legal claim for membership does not exist.

The Knights of Rizal outside the Philippines

As described earlier, it depends upon the authorities of the host country, who are given the task to evaluate orders of chivalry, whether to accept them in the country or not. This includes appending requirements concerning membership. Since, the Republic of the Philippines is a state internationally accepted, therefore the Knights of Rizal having been chartered by it, also enjoys recognition by states that have diplomatic relationships with it. How far and how much this recognition of the order in each country extends to, depends on the ruling administration. There are countries wherein members are required to seek government approval prior to becoming a knight of the order. On the other hand, in some countries the Knights of Rizal are treated as regular society that mimics an order of chivalry. However, some notable members of the order, such as King Juan Carlos of Spain, former American Foreign Secretary and Nobel peace prize laureate, Henry Kissinger and other noted Filipinos who are recipients of the order's decoration certainly give credence and dignity to it. The Archbishop of Manila is also a member of the order dispelling any notion that the order could be Masonic. The late Jaime Cardinal L. Sin was honored with the highest degree of membership. He also blessed the building where the order established its international headquarters in Manila.

The European view seems to be that the Order of the Knights of Rizal is a secular fraternity and a worldwide institution; that its titles and rituals are reminiscent of chivalric traditions and therefore self-styled. Its members wear ceremonial uniforms in appropriate occasions. Patriotic and civic, which adorn its motto: those words refer more to the man Rizal rather than a battle cry per se. From its public relations the order is neither a sect nor is it a quasi-Masonic organization. This comparison cannot be drawn, even if the order according to its objectives promotes among its members a certain philosophy. What is known as Rizalism summarizes a canon of virtues that are, in essence, challenge and instruction. They are intended to teach an attitude by which one can lead an exemplary life.

Similar to Rotary Clubs, the Knights of Rizal devote itself with benevolent projects. In cooperation with governmental, as well as, private entities, it contributes to community service in the Philippines. To become a Knight of Rizal is purely a fraternal title, and does not imply that its bearer becomes aristocratic, in name or in blood. However, he may add his rank after his name to indicate his membership, without the prefix "Sir", which is limited to a polite means of addressing each other within the organization. It does not, by any means, ennoble a Knight of Rizal. It is well recommended that Knights of Rizal refer to themselves as brothers, in any official capacity, to avoid confusion with the British title that denotes nobility. European

chapters are well advised to act accordingly. In any case, Knights of Rizal should never use their rank for self-serving purposes. It should only be used in connection with the order and to its charitable, social or cultural activities, and hence must not interfere with heraldic jurisdictions of states that have constituted own orders of chivalry that run back to and have deep roots in feudalism. Such has never been the case in the Philippines not even during the long centuries of Spanish colonization. Despite nobility existing in the Philippines during the Spanish regime, idea and concept of a chivalric institution patterned after the European model never came to pass.

The order's international status and state of recognition requires further clarification in Europe more than in Asia and the American continent. This stems from the fact that chivalry in the former is unique and is held in high regard than anywhere else. European countries have constitutional monarchies or previously had monarchical forms of government. Thus, any attempt to improve the order's standing and acceptance should start in Europe. It is incumbent upon European chapters, with the corresponding support from the Supreme Council of the order, to intensify efforts towards this goal of earning recognition, distinct and apart from the genre of self-styled orders. It is no secret that countries such as Great Britain, France and Italy have fierce disinclination towards self-styled orders.

In 1953, two years after the passage of Philippine Republic Act 646 establishing the order, an issue of "Hidalguia" in Italy, listed the Knights of Rizal, among other orders as self-styled. Therefore, its decorations were not allowed to be accepted, much less worn, by politicians or diplomats. This view the Holy See seems not to follow, which updates own lists of illegitimate orders. This might be due to the fact that the Holy See is either not cognizant of the existence of this Philippine order, or it does not consider it an order at all. But obviously one can come to controversial conclusions when evaluating the Knights of Rizal: either as semi-official Philippine merit award or as self-styled order of chivalry. As order of chivalry it is not considered as to heraldic jurisdiction, but as such it was never founded. Here a mutual misunderstanding clashes. Although chivalric in style, the order's rankings and rituals do not claim to be chivalric as understood in Europe. Alas, by this civilian decoration Philippine culture and history is expressed in forms that are too much borrowed. Being Knight of Rizal honors civilian achievements and is synonymous with a 'corporate and politic body' under Philippine legislature. Membership therein should be based on meritocracy where only selected individuals are accepted. This though must also be guiding outside Philippine Realm, whether

in the public or by official recognition in the host country, where chapters of the brotherhood are defined as juridical personalities in terms of national law.

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Queen Elizabeth II has not sanctioned the status of the Knights of Rizal in the United Kingdom, though legalized. As a legal entity, the order is governed by the Charity Commission. The status as a registered charitable institution, it is required to declare its finances annually. In the United Kingdom the entity with similarities to the Philippine Order of the Knights of Rizal is the Most Venerable Order of St. John. It is simply regarded as a society without noble requirements and no noble powers. However, it enjoys the Kingdom's recognition and in return, members of the Royal family enjoy royal prerogatives in said Order. In the same way that the Philippine Congress chartered the Knights of Rizal, the Royal Charter granted recognition to the Most Venerable Order of St. John. As order with chivalric trappings the Knights of Rizal are not recognized. It is purely on that basis Filipino and not British. Again, though being recognized by Philippine law, this recognition is –as described– meaningless, from a strictly chivalric point of view. Understandably, the national aspect of the orders plays a role in matters of state recognition. In Germany, the Knights of Rizal are de jure non-existent, as well. The chapters in Hamburg, Bonn, Cologne and other cities are registered as associations for charity purposes. Under German law, they are exempted from income taxes.

Stand in comparison and competition?

Following the traditions of the Knights Hospitalers of Malta, the Order of St. John and other well-established orders, the Most Noble Order of Rizal was created and is based in Sydney, Australia. It operates as a non-profit, charitable organization. Included in its tenets are the permanent study of the life and teachings of José Rizal and pursuing his ideals for the benefit of mankind. The Noble Order is presently maintaining several charity projects in the

Philippines. So far, there are no signs that the organization is in direct competition to the Knights of Rizal as it does not take part in any public commemoration of the Philippine national hero.

One Order that comparably approaches the Knights of Rizal is the Knights of Columbus. Founded in 1882 by Father Michael J. McGivney, a Catholic priest, it has evolved to a religious fraternal union worldwide. Although independent from the Roman Catholic Church, it is rightly called the latter's "strong right arm" because of its devotion to and voluntary support of Catholicism. Its administrative hierarchy resembles the Knights of Rizal with a Supreme Council composed of a duly elected Board of Directors. State and local Councils are subordinate to it. The members serve in four distinct degrees, which are coupled with exemplary principles that are valid within the Order. The Knights of Columbus also use a corporate design, including official emblems. Several organizations are affiliated to it.

What do we learn from the history of organizations? That its forms should change as times change. The horizon is broadening and we are at a crossroad. Where are we going? Is being a Knight of Rizal synonymous with being Rizalist? Yes, ideally! But we do not rise, if we do not take down ideals from heaven to earth. Adjusting to the future means to be more than an impression: that the Knights of Rizal is an order based on chivalry by definition but an international fraternity. Philippine Republic Act 646 and the order's by-laws explicitly declare it a civic, patriotic, cultural, non-partisan and non-sectarian organization. Under the laws of the Philippines, it is excluded from restrictive provisions of the Corporation Code. Even if this is not intended but it happens, namely: that they appear to others what they are not and what they need not to be. It is not to be denied that the order is a modern body with noble objectives embodied in chivalric terms. It is not to be denied that the order today has mushroomed into a respectable and globally admired fraternal organization. Ultimate goal is to spread Rizal's vision, which is for men, not for individuals. Then they are the Knights of Rizal; if they are, by word and deed, what they ought to be, then they have accomplished greatness that knows no fear but ignorance; that demands nothing but its right – a greatness that makes them worthy and does not need justification. Not for them, not before others.

One nation, one hero

In the first decades after Rizal's martyrdom, Colonel Antonio Torres rallied his admirers. The ex-Chief of Police of Manila, together with Juan Flamenó, Martín de Veyra, José del Barrio and José Galvez incorporated the "Orden de Caballeros de Rizal" in 1916. At this time the Philippine Islands were still under American administration. Nevertheless, a first step was done towards the public commemoration of José Rizal as national hero of a people just on the verge of emerging as a nation. In 1951, five years after the formal independence of the Philippines, its Second Congress gathered to enact a Charter creating the Order of the Knights of Rizal. The Charter mandated adoption of noble objectives, which were already adapted decades before. The preamble of the bill that subsequently became known as Republic Act 646, read as follows:

"The purpose of the attached bill is to accord to the civic and patriotic organization known as Orden de Caballeros de Rizal (Order of the Knights of Rizal) the same kind of official recognition and encouragement as that accorded to the Boy Scouts of the Philippines by Commonwealth Act No. 111 . . .

"The bill if enacted into law will also serve as a historical monument to Rizal; it will constitute an official recognition by the Republic of the Philippines of the inestimable value to the nation of his teachings and examples and of the wisdom and necessity of inculcating them in the minds and heads of our people so they may strive to follow and practice them. The authors and proponents of this bill believe that if the purposes thereof are faithfully and effectively carried out, social discipline, civic virtues, and love of justice will be fostered, promoted, and enhanced in this country, and that the Knights of Rizal as chartered entity is the most convenient instrumentality by which this desirable ends can be attained: Let Rizal's life and martyrdom influence and guide the destiny of the nation. Let this and future generations live the Rizal way ."

Today we remember the legislative groundwork laid almost 60 years ago. It was more than a simple administrative act. It is a written monument dedicated to propagate the historical relevance of José Rizal. It is up to the order bearing his name to foster a monument, “more lasting than stone”, quoting Horace, the Roman poet from whom the order’s motto stems. It is the work of generations after his death to nurture and maintain his heritage. In this way, the Order of the Knights of Rizal is a powerful expression of Filipino self-confidence and a visible search for the image the hero’s nation has of herself.

The order has spread its roots. It is found thriving in different parts of the world. It has developed affiliate organizations, including women associations, such as the Kababaihang Rizalista, Inc. (KRI). Outside the Philippines the order’s chapters are generally accepted as part of Philippine culture. Although they cannot look back into a long tradition, as in the case of some renowned orders, there is no need to pale in comparison, nor bow to criticism.

The Knights of Rizal should be there, where they help those who cannot help themselves; where there is a need to let voices ring against oppression; where they must prove their value instead of preaching; where Rizal’s ideals can be employed. But the battles of the 19th century may not be exactly those of the 21st century. If Rizal were in our midst today, he would probably still harp on the same calamities existing in his time. His teachings, ideals and thoughts still are valid, more than ever. There is injustice everywhere, poverty –in worldly and spiritual things– still prevails; hopelessness pervades and inequality remains. These are enemies Rizal’s heirs need to engage in battle – and not only in the Philippines. Her Excellency, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, saw the banner that is held by the Knights of Rizal as she was honored with the Teodora Alonzo Award of the Supreme Council. In her acceptance speech she explained:

“And in my work as the mother of the nation I ask you, the Knights of Rizal, to help me continue the work that I have started to do. In order to help me continue the work that I have started to do – to improve moral standards in government and society, to fight poverty and win the battle against poverty before decade is over, to lead by example, to bring about new politics – I need you”

Now we are just about to discover possibilities that are meant for us, as Rizal’s followers. Let us prove to be worthy of and willing to adopt his heritage. What he represents unites over continents. His thinking, in retrospect, is progressive and we can be certain in attributing it to his education, his travels and his unquenchable quest for knowledge.

Impressive is Rizal’s cosmopolitanism. During an age, driven by nationalism and imperialism, he was interested in the culture of other countries, not to feel superior to them but to understand them; not to conquer them, but to experience them, to penetrate their secret. He traveled a lot and felt at home in Europe, from an intellectual point of view. Visiting France, Belgium, Italy, Germany and England he met people in these countries. He eagerly and successfully learned their languages, leading to mutual understandings, which led to lasting and eventful friendships. Among these friendships were those with Ferdinand Blumentritt or Karl Ullmer, pastor in Wilhelmsfeld, near Heidelberg, where Rizal lived as a student for some time. Rizal espoused tolerance and non-violence, long before Gandhi or Martin Luther King made these traits their own. Deep within him he felt desire to give all for his beliefs including his life, which he expressed so eloquently in his book “El Filibusterismo”. Like another famous author, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, who came decades after him, he did not preach to his readers to practice the traits described in his literary works. He practiced them himself. So, we find a wondrous equivalent of what is written and done. Rizal’s works stage the own life that inspired them. By bravely enduring his martyrdom, he demonstrated personal sacrifice, which also addressed even those who did not agree with him. This sacrifice led to the dream of Philippine nation the time gave birth. If Bonifacio was her political midwife, Rizal was her intellectual father –and her moral one– until today. His nation deems him as such:

“Rizal”, as Leon Ma. Guerrero put it, *“is the first Filipino because he is first in the hearts of the Filipinos. Nations are known by the heroes they have. If a people have the government they deserve, they have also heroes made in her own image and likeness. It was Rizal who lifted up the hearts of his generation, and who is enshrined by the Nation and Republic he made*
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But we must not mistake Rizal for the image we have made of him. We should also not succumb to the risk that his teachings are forgotten, because we might be spending more time in charity events and commemoration fiestas.

Epilogue

Since its establishment, the International Federation of the Knights of Rizal (IFKOR) has been envisioned to become the core uniting the national Filipino communities: to refresh their springs and to rebuild their character. It should be the vessel through which the Rizalian spirit may form root. As such it remains appreciated and always endangered. Each community is found in the heart, first of all. While there is still a mistaken belief for some to equate the Knights of Rizal as belonging to a religious sect, it is through the media coverage of the activities of the involvement of the organization in the community. This corporation founded in honor of José Rizal becomes insignificant, if those who bear responsibility in its ranks will not refrain from propagating Philippine nationalism, but Rizalian cosmopolitanism. If this trail will not be taken, the Rizal order will disappear definitely, wherever it exists. As members their mandate was, in fact, given by a sovereign decision of the Philippine Congress in 1951, not by birth or own mercy. Their chartered corporation needs Rizal, but Rizal does not need any corporation that bears his name. It fails as long as it turns away from pursuing its objectives to doing party politics. In this way, its ranks and decorations, which are purely fraternal, become absurd. Sponsoring worthwhile projects, where Knights of Rizal are involved in community affairs, establish public relations. And good work shall be for good-willing people to know and differentiate them from other groups. In other words, educating the public to better understanding Rizal and Rizalism, that they must be perceived to belong to an “Order” unique and different from others. When competing than in what they can life up as example: to give

Rizalian chivalry face and voice. Through service to merits! With pride of what can be accomplished together, not against each other, I see with timeless eyes in each Rizalist the master of a strong ceremony and the prince of common convictions. Through service to merits! And those who want to conquer the world shall discover that they must conquer first their values before extending their circle of relations. We few but true, admirers of Rizal, are aware that we should not try less than what he himself once recommended. In his letter, dated from 28 January 1889, he wrote to the members of "La Solidaridad" in Barcelona:

"... Though I have no doubt that my advice is useless, for every member of 'La Solidaridad' is worth as much as I and more, considering that they are right on the spot, nevertheless, just to fill a sheet of paper, I will allow myself to write you some common observations which all of you undoubtedly know, but which cannot annoy by being written on a sheet of paper.

"1. In young associations the spirit of tolerance ought to prevail when it concerns trifles that do not affect the essential part of a thing; in the discussions, the conciliatory tendency ought to dominate before the tendency oppose. No one should resent defeat. When any opinion is rejected, its author, instead of despairing and withdrawing, should on the contrary wait for another occasion in which justice may be done him. The individual should give way to the welfare of society. And so that the very delicate self-esteem of the Filipino who is besides an unconscious individual may come out least hurt in the discussions, and discontent may be avoided, it would be advisable that to all propositions, proposal, projects etc. should always be added the ending: We think thus, if the other members have no objection, or any other similar phrase that you may deem more appropriate, I have heard many discussions arising from questions of self-esteem. Laying this aside, the decisions of the majority, after a sufficient discussion, are sacred and unquestionable.

"2. A great deal of integrity and much good will. No one should expect rewards or

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