

The Value of Fraternities in Our Time

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Thank you, Brod. It's a pleasure to be introduced by the one-time honorable, the sometimes incredible, but the always likeable Brod Raoul V. Victorino. *One-time honorable*, because he was once the Hon. Raoul V. Victorino, Chief Presidential Legal Counsel of President Gloria Macapagal, *sometimes incredible*, because when it is a brod he presents, he tends to overstate his subject's virtues, *always admirable*, because he is charming to everyone, brod and non-brod alike.

Dear Brods, your beloved spouses, partners, or best friends,
distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

I'm delighted to be with you today, the 72nd anniversary celebration of our fraternity, the U.P. Beta Sigma. Today we recall its founding, barely ten days after the birth of the Republic, and how it has been faithful to the ideal of striving for "all that is good and noble in man." The brethren who have made their mark in government, in business, and in other endeavors of independent life are too many, I shall not attempt to name them, lest I make omissions for which I will not be forgiven. I know that we must praise famous men, and so I suggest we make that a project, along with an alumni directory.

Let me now recall our own time as Beta Sigmas. We were admitted into the fraternity in 1952, most of us classmates from the U.P. College of Liberal Arts. After surviving the first year of university life, we felt the need for belonging. But these were the Fifties. The egalitarian principle had not yet gained much foothold in the ex-colony. The landscape was dotted with social classes. Unless one had a pedigree, the only way to gain recognition was to show excellence of mind and body. Here was the U.P. Beta Sigma, Brotherhood of Scholars, in which we could possibly find our identity. Brod Pros Crescini could very well write, not of social climbing, but of “climb[ing] barriers of wealth, region, creed, and prejudice.”

Those years were also the roaring Fifties. One could likewise describe college life in those days as days of “Liberty, Equality and Fraternity.” Boys took liberties at everything. As a result, many of them flunked after the first semester as the University insisted on a sound mind in a sound body as the only standard of recognition. What about fraternity, the last in the trilogy of liberty, equality and fraternity? Fraternities were the dread of parents. Nothing worried them more than fraternities.

There was a body that supervised student activities at that time, the UCSOA, much feared for its power to withdraw university recognition for infraction of its rules. It was chaired by the College of Law terror, Professor Vicente Abad Santos, who later became Justice of the Supreme Court.

There could have been other reasons for wanting to join Beta Sigma, e.g., the desire to belong to a secret or exclusive society or to be popular with the girls on the campus, but to the majority of us I think the distinction of belonging to a company of kindred spirit was what mattered most. Beta Sigma was founded as a brotherhood of scholars, although the paddle was the means of gaining admission

to it. Then as now the paddle was the supreme arbiter of loyalty and the tested instrument for making the slaves remember the names of the masters.

“Not All Men Are Brothers”

In any event, fraternity membership was the prize to be won. Not all men were brothers. Only fellow frat men were brods. If not all men were brothers, what were the others? Well, we called them “barbarians”!

In seeking to be fraternity members, were we not ourselves guilty of creating barriers of exclusivity? The answer is no. Not any more than those who seek to be members of other groups whether religious, political, or intellectual. Not any more than those who join a church or Freemasonry or the Society of Sages. For even among the members of these exclusive organizations can be found social classes. What we were after was the exclusive company of people who had the same ideals or goals in life regardless of social status or station in life.

In no time the feeling of belonging to a fraternity became enlarged into a feeling of belonging to a larger community, and we realized that to be a good nationalist, for example, was to be a good frat man. As we grew older and more mature, the word “fraternity” took on the hold of an idea.

“Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité”

Is this nothing more than a mushy idea, an old fashioned sentimentalism, or a hardy surviving anachronism which is irrelevant in the age of individualism and technological change? It is an old idea. It was used by crafts and guilds in the ancient world, by religious groups, as well as others like merchants, and soon it was enlisted in the service of revolutionary and rights movements. It inspired the French Revolution of 1793, which embodied it in its motto “Liberte Egalité Fraternité,” It was later enshrined by the French in their Constitution of 1848.

It is an old idea but an idea whose time had come. It is not a mushy concept, old-fashioned sentimentalism, or a hardy surviving anachronism. Thus in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 is proclaimed “as a common to be standard of achievement for all peoples” that

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.
They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act
towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

For our part, we proclaim in our Constitution as our goal as a sovereign people “a regime of truth, justice, freedom, love, equality, and peace.”

The vitality of fraternity as an idea is its capacity to stir up feelings of kinship, love, affection, concern for others, loyalty, trust, sharing of goals and aspirations, what is summed up in our credo as “all that is good and noble in Man.” Indeed only last week, it was reported that France’s Constitutional Court acquitted a farmer (Cedric Herrou) who had been fined for aiding dozens of migrants from entering the country illegally. “The principle of fraternity, which is one of the three values that make up France’s national motto Liberty, Equality and Fraternity, confers the freedom to help others, for humanitarian purposes, regardless of the legality of their presence on national territory,” the court wrote in its decision.

Herron, an olive farmer, became something of a folk hero in 2017 after he was fined E3,000 for providing assistance to dozens of migrants in the Roya Valley, which stretches along the border between France and Italy. It was said that the landmark decision was likely to have far-reaching implications for the rest of Europe.

Now is there any other idea more valuable than that which inculcates in the young the virtue fraternity as part of their education for citizenship?

