

The residuality of the Nobility in the Meritorious Systems of today. Revive a cultural engine.

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Summary

To recognize merits of people or groups is fundamental not only as an honorary reward but also as an engine for promotion and social cohesion. From the earliest times ongoing the Sovereign States have developed their own merit systems ranging from traditional noble honors to Knightly Orders up to civil merits of various degrees. The patrician families draw their origins not only from the founding acts of cities and states, but also from the heroic deeds of their founders. Similarly, public and private institutions of considerable importance such as universities, scientific academies and cultural and religious associations have developed their own systems to recognize and support the value of deserving people. Obviously, the meritorious structure of society is strongly influenced by its legal structure and foundation and the transition from aristocratic and monarchical noble structures to plebiscitarian, egalitarian and republican structures cannot take place without a profound influence on the instruments used to honour its components. There have been extreme applications of the concept of equality in a general collectivized vision with complete denial of any recognition of merit. The failure of these attempts, where meritorious persons have cannot be honoured properly only because citizen of certain political regimes, demonstrates the natural human necessity for the existence of systems apt to recognize excellence.

In the present reflections we analyse the different ways of modern application of both traditional and innovative tools to recognize excellence and merit, in order to allow for the survival of the concept of merit, in contrast to a levelling and collectivized vision of society. This analysis examines also the persistence of residualities of an aristocratic structure and nobility in the modern instruments of recognition of merit and excellence.

Recognizing the civil or military merits of people who have distinguished themselves in a special way with de facto or intellectual enterprises is important not only in terms of personal gratification, but also constitutes an educational path for the civilian growth of the state.

At all times history of humankind has known specific, more or less structured, systems of recognition of personal merit. This goes from commemorative plaques and gravestones to honourable mentions in yearbooks, up to the formal structured officially granted awards and honours. Sovereign states are obviously at the forefront of this path, whether they are governed by an aristocratic and noble civil structure, that is, recognizing a structural social diversification based on the class of the ruling and dominant classes (or on what was the nobility), or after the American and French Revolution, on a universal egalitarian basis, whether in a monarchical or republican political form.

Contrary to what is often believed, acknowledging merit traditionally does not involve or automatically entail the granting of material privileges to the person, but can be done in the form of immaterial recognition only. Perhaps in most mature and well structured forms of official honours especially in countries governed with an aristocratic social structure, it was traditionally accompanied by both economic and social status benefits and / or from entering the nobility. For this social promotion see for example the Order of Vitéz of Hungary, which was both ennobling and gave rise to the concession of land.

One of the ways to recognize value is constituted by the acceptance in one of the traditional Knightly Orders, constituted over the centuries by the various sovereign powers, with the conferral of its internal degrees. We immediately state that we do not wish to enter into the typical definitions and articulations of this topic, which in our opinion is in detail and exhaustively defined in the provisions and rules agreed within the International Commission of Orders of Chivalry (ICOC). It

may suffice to say that this path is especially suited to States governed with an aristocratic imprint. Admission into an Order, that is a regulated and exclusive structure, has over time often assumed a close connection with the social division into patrician and non-patrician classes.

In modern democratic republican forms of government with universal suffrage - where the nobility is no longer recognized due to the egalitarian social policy - such divisions are unrecognizable, creating the need to take different paths in order to recognize civil merits. Let's not forget that the perceived, historical and traditional, aristocratic-noble and non-egalitarian nature of the Orders of Chivalry led in the newborn United States of America to the proposal of a bill - then lapsed - to expressly forbid, under penalty of deprivation of citizenship, the acceptance by US citizens of chivalric merits or entry into noble orders! In essence, the "chivalrous" nature of a merit is often perceived as ennobling and incompatible with a republican order. Although the legal prohibition of granting noble titles by the single State Authorities retains full validity in the USA, there is still respect for what was the nobility in Europe. This to the extent that many honorary citizenships in the ancient Southern States have names that recall the European Noble Titles! Some honorary citizenships are called: Duke of Paduch, Duke of Albuquerque, Duke and Duchess of Hazard etc. which is are proof of this.

In republican Italy, in creating in 1951 the chivalric structures of the Order of Merit of the Republic, in both civil and military form, as well as the Order of the Star of Italy for foreigners or Italians living abroad, it is expressly specified in the statutes that the granting does not gives rise to privileges, neither in economic form (annuities) nor in the form of diplomatic precedence, even if it recognizes its primary position in the list of merits of the State (with the same characteristics of the noble titles during the Kingdom of Italy). Interesting the inversion of the honorary precedence: the highest Honour of the Republic of Italy is the Order of Merit in its civil form, while under the Kingdom the military forms always came first. Other states, such as the Federal Republic of Germany, maintain a similar meritorious structure, in this case the Bundesverdienstkreuz, bestowed in the classic five degrees completed by the Grand Collar, but expressly specify its meritorious and non-chivalrous civil character with an egalitarian nature. In line with this fact, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany can recognize foreign orders, such as the Knighthood of OMRI. These perhaps must be carried with the indication of its foreign origin in order to avoid any confusion with German noble titles transformed into an integral part of the surname without noble value under public law with the revolution of 1918. Ifor example the honour of Grand Officer of the Italian Order of Merit if recognized by the President of Germany, can be mentioned in personal stationary in Italian or in the form "Großoffizier des italienischen Verdienstordens". The conceptually more correct wording of "Großoffizier des italienischen Verdienst Ritterordens" would be questionable for a citizen of German nationality. The specificities and differences in national sovereign legislations have always to be taken into account.

The parallelism between church and state sovereignty in European history from the Theodosian decrees of 391 onwards to the French Revolution of 1789, has favoured the realization of the convergence between a substantially religious structure, the Orders, and the need of the State to recognize merits of its citizens, especially military and knightly. Thus came into existance the typical structural form of the Order of Chivalry with its adherence to the different social classes. This, with the fall of the great European monarchies and the prevalence of republics based on a plebiscitary and egalitarian vision of society, has created quite a few discrepancies, both normative and interpretative.

The Italian Republic's legislation respects history by allowing it's citizens to wear pre-unification dynastic decorations (authorized under the law of March 3, 1951, n.178). This maintains legal value of once noble orders such as the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George, the Order of San Gennaro, the Order of Santo Stefano Pope and Martyr and the Order of San Ludovico, which -

although today they do not confer nobility - accept the maintenance of the ancient classes once reserved only for the nobles.

In line with what has been said previously, the recognition by international law, if issued by a sovereignty recognized at the level of the United Nations, and those by national law as mentioned above must be kept divided. Again in the example of Germany, the State recognizes through international reciprocity and in the absence of specific personal obstacles, the merits of the Italian State, but not those of the pre-unification states, no longer subjects of international law and therefore unrecognizable. It also recognizes the orders of the Holy See and the Order of Malta, but not as historical-religious subjects, but only as sovereign subjects of recognized international law. The legal basis of the recognition with authorization to use its titles and decorations remains therefore substantially different.

In this complex matter, in which history and current affairs, national and international law meet in a complex way, a rigorous scientific definition and systematization is required and the ICOC, with its choice to clearly support and maintain distinct orders still supported by internationally recognized sovereignty from structures founded by extinct or no longer active sovereignties but regularly constituted during their period of full power, solves most of the questions posed in the traditional area of the Knightly Orders.

Besides this it is now necessary to look at what is not, or is no longer, covered by the specific structures of traditional Knightly Orders. And it should be noted that we are not dealing with a residual or secondary issue. In the modern evolution of the state these meritorious systems not inspired by the monarchical state structure are by far prevalent. A brief look at the countries that lead the world today is revealing. The United States of America have maintained a structural opposition to any form of orderly structure and only confer merits in the form of a medal of valor. Similarly, China which still follows the political lines of its communist revolution, albeit applied now with a different economic vision, only admits individual merits that register valiant acts, but does not grant privileges. Modern Russia has reactivated what was once the ennobling Order of Saint Andrew, as Poland has done with the Order of Saint Stephan, but without the connotations of civil difference. Germany has removed the legal value of the concept of the Chivalric Order, giving only civil merits, albeit in a graded order-like form. An anomaly remains France, with the Legion of Honor and the orders that survived the reform of 1963, and Italy, with the Orders of Merit, the Star of Italy and the uninominal form of the "Cavalierato del Lavoro".

Incidentally, it may be interesting to note that typically the States that more or less consciously refer to the structure of social promotion of the person inspired by the noble status, confer their merits in a unique non-repeatable form, while the merits for acts of valor that do not have class inspiration, are repeatable. One cannot be welcomed twice into a Chivalric Order, but one can receive the US "Purple Heart" or the Order of Lenin in the days of the Soviet Union, for several times. In Italy the difference is well realized between the Order of Merit of the Republic, conferred once albeit in different grades, and the Medal of Valor, which can be awarded repeatedly. The prevalence of one or another characteristic depends on the statutes. The aforementioned Order of Vitéz of Hungary is a single class recognition for deeds of valor, but the ennobling nature prevails which makes it a unique and unrepeatable concession.

In this scenario, for the republican state arises the need for new forms of bonuses to be granted to its citizens, who cannot be satisfied with belonging to historical forms, sometimes very noble but frozen and static, now distant and alien to the established sovereign power and the new graduations that represent civil power inside every specific society. In fact, being able to consider for public applause actions of civil and military merit, remains an absolute requirement for any civil coexistence, even if the proponents of the more orthodox collectivism will always try to oppose

this. Freezing the meritorious systems in the forms of monarchical foundation would be extremely limiting and in the very end result in the progressive reduction up to final death by extinction of the structures themselves, *de facto* realising the collectivist dream!

Every society must be able to confer active forms of support for meritorious act. The survival of historical forms of monarchical origin is good and useful, but republican political evolution must be allowed to develop its own forms of elevation and social distinction. These forms must be compatible and follow the modern rules of the state to stay alive and operating. In first instance they can no longer be linked to a single power, as natural in an autocratic monarchy, but they too must follow the diffusion of powers in the social body. Already the evolution of the monarchy from autocratic to parliamentary had already greatly affected the statutory powers of the King with respect to his ability to change the statutes of its orders of merits, being them stately or dynastic, during its reign. The advent of the parliamentary republic, articulated in rigid divisions of powers with their widespread distribution throughout the territory, often in a deliberately autonomous and competitive form, must now find its correspondence in the structure of differential merit recognition.

We will therefore have merits rooted in the sovereign power of the State, but also others that root in specific territorial articulations of public power, such as regions, municipalities and other state bodies. An example are the merits of the large public hospital organizations, such as the University Hospital of Milan with the medal of the Annunciation or the United Hospitals of Lodi which in 2007 approved with official decree the establishment of a merit medal in the three degrees of bronze, silver and gold for merits of seniority, function and outstanding executive achievements, respectively. These recognitions are accompanied by the inscriptions in the marble tables of honour and remembrance, as present in many public and private historical institutions as well as in the Institutes seat of the University Chair.

Incidentally, the aversion to these forms of recognition of merit by collectivist ideology is interesting, as this inferentially demonstrates their importance and validity for differential human promotion.

The need to recognize merit certainly does not stop within the walls of public administrative and bureaucratic institutions. Precisely in the United States, the country that more than others since its foundation in July 4, 1776 had opposed the aristocratic structures of merit, the birth of more and more articulated and innovative merit forms has spread especially in parastatal and even private structures. The Federated States and many municipalities autonomously manage their own meritorious systems in full autonomy, such as the Kentucky Colonels.

In this apparent confusion it is natural to want to simplify and bring order by denying the new meritorious forms a proper value, recognizing only the historical ones. And there are certainly good reasons for this. But it is necessary to reflect on the profound risks that such a rigid traditional and mainly historical attitude would entail.

As already said, restricting the power of conferring discriminating merit attestations to a few closed realities, the majority of which are historic and frozen in their statutory profile by the loss of the sovereign powers required by their own statute for any modification, risks to lead slowly to their extinction. The exasperation of a rigorous historical vision risks to hand over the whole legal institution of Merit Recognition to obsolescence, thus realizing the dream of its most bitter enemies and killing an institution necessary for human promotion and the evolution of human culture through the distinction of personal value in the community.

On the other hand, it seems that it is not even feasible to recognize equal dignity to the multitude of meritorious forms existing in the world. Obviously a graduation is necessary, with a clear and

consolidated distinction. At this point we can call for help precisely the most traditional forms of recognition of merit, which in Europe are the Orders of Chivalry. In the past times all sovereign states, large and small, important or secondary, were governed with very few exceptions by monarchies and had the power to establish proper orders. This situation of formal equality could obviously lead to great confusion. The fact that this did not happen, or occurred only in a marginal and sometimes anecdotal way, was due to a reason as simple as it was effective: Darwin's laws apply to societies as well. The Orders of Chivalry were born to bring together men of particular merit and ideal vision, diversifying them from other, more orderly, subjects. The orders in turn diversified among themselves in their history by ideal content and prestigious birth, soon creating a ranking based on the convergence between seriousness of management and nobility of legitimacy.

In the same way, the world of modern merits must be faced. Also in this case the two different elements of internal management and origin are evident. Let us take up an example taken from the United States. They do not feel the need for public recognition of universities, as they trust in the selective capacity of the public image derived from the value of their respective graduates. Certainly an Ivy League graduate carries in his pocket a title of very different value than the one that was crowned with the laurel by a Californian institution that offers mail-order titles for a fee. The mechanism of spontaneous selection helps, but does not exempt us from opening a scientific examination that can help to face the new phenomenon of modern meritorious structures in a systematic, analytical and evaluative way.

Some elements of distinction can be immediately identified. First of all, it is important to establish whether the foundation of merit takes place by a public or private power and, if public, what position in the hierarchy of public powers this power occupies. If the foundation takes place instead by a private, religious or civil law entity, the condition and value of the founding body (non-profit, natural person, legal person, etc.) will instead be of interest.

It is perhaps essential to always remember that the most important element is and remains constituted by the method and selectivity of the conferment. The first accusation against modern merit systems is the not always certain and documented relationship between the conferment and / or the degree of the same, and the real merit of the receiving person. Collectivist and Marxian ideology obviously accuse all systems of human differentiation of being of mere profit-making genesis, and unfortunately often this accusation, predetermined and uncritical, is made credible by certainly not excellent behaviours of many associations, brotherhoods, presumed orders and the like. The most important element of credibility and value of every merit system, of every order, of every association is constituted by the statutory and regulatory clarity in the affiliations, its selectivity and discrimination.

It should be noted that mentioning the need to avoid to make a general distinction of the economic aspects of affiliation has no pauperist purpose! Instead, it is necessary to establish a clear and declared correlation between selection procedures and associative purposes. An association that is clearly aimed at financially supporting social assistance works, will rightly graduate its affiliates according to the size of the contribution. We can take as an example the multitude of so-called "Service Clubs" or religious and lay associations aimed at providing assistance. Different but similar is the situation of the associations that see it their aim to support the arts and science, here too the economic contribution that allows the subsidiarity between public funding and patronage is qualifying and as such should be rightly recognized. Service clubs often have specific merit systems within them, such as the "Paul Harris" medal in Rotary, but these remain marginal and never take on a prevalence in respect to its charitable purposes.

There are various degrees of prevalence and mingling between the aims of economic aid and moral support within the different institutions. An example is the Order of the Holy Sepulcher, which has in its declared aims the economic support of the Works in the Holy Land. The same so-called military religious orders are born with operational purposes, which in the example of the Order of St. John was hospital assistance and the defence of pilgrims in the Holy Land. The Giovannite Order is a Chivalric Order that formally maintains within it the social differences characteristic of the nobility where belonging to an elite is more important than personal merit, but it should be noted that while still being called noble (with a noble characteristic) in the current reality today it is composed by 70% of non-nobles. This does not prevent that in the collective imagination to appear composed of an absolute noble majority.

Alongside of the associations finalized to economically relevant goals, as described above, there are also meritorious systems that we could call aneconomic or with a predominantly non-economic purpose. A typical example is given by the associations between academics, such as the Accademia dei Lincei. Their primary purpose is to create a biotope favourable to the thought and the cultural and intellectual growth of a specific group of people who fall within the declared aims of the association, as well as giving a tangible recognition of achieved goals. It should be noted that they can have a public or private character which little influence on their purpose. These combine the proactive operational element, that is, the achievement of an intellectual goal to be pursued, with the static element, *ex post*, of the recognition of personal excellence for acts already committed previously and independently.

One of the best-known examples of an association aimed at *ex post* recognition of acts of excellence in the sciences is the Nobel Foundation, which does not fund research but rewards people who have already demonstrated their value for humanity with excellent scientific ingenuity. No one would question the value of the Nobel Prize today, even if it was founded by a private individual. Alfred Nobel was a private person who had the power and excellence to call the professors of the Stockholm Academy of Sciences to the assignment committee of his foundation and the King of Sweden to preside it.

At this point we can draw some conclusions.

The first is that the existence of reward systems that recognize the value and merits of men is natural and necessary in all developed societies. It favours human promotion and cultural growth, has a social paedagogic function and helps in good governance. The second is that these systems must be articulated in a way as to be able to express themselves effectively and practically in the present modern society. They must apply the structural and organizational paradigms compatible both with the laws of the State in which they operate, and with the purposes of human promotion to which they aspire. In essence, they must be accessible to men of value, credible to the general social community and viable in their normative form.

The meritorious systems can be placed side by side with social or moral operational purposes, or be of pure recognition of excellence already achieved. In the present reflection we focus on the second aspect in its form of promotional gratification and social teaching.

As already mentioned, the awards must be obtainable and active in the social vision of the moment. An excellent merit which not obtainable now by law or local custom, has historical museum value but cannot be called upon to contribute to the role of social teaching. Precisely in the spirit of the traditional noble Knightly Orders, the merits must be accessible to all for the sole distinction of personal value, giving the recipient a typical moral, ethical and social specificity. The evolution of

the meritorious systems must proceed in harmony with the development of the political and constitutional legislation of the State.

It is therefore necessary to elaborate a structured definition which supports the birth, development and qualitative control of both old and new, private and public merit systems. It is also necessary to develop a clear discrimination scale between associations with an economically relevant operational purpose, aimed essentially at fundraising, and meritorious systems of pure recognition, aimed at identifying and publicly supporting meritorious behaviour, useful for human promotion in general. One must apply the spirit and the concepts of nobility with its basics of a strong and well-defined vision of social distinction in opposition to anonymous collectivism. These "residuals of nobility", must inspire and translate into new and open, living forms of promotion of human meritorious acts in the modern world.

In this category both public and private institutions can have a role. The former will have the benefit of the power of the State in charge at that historical moment, with its presumption of institutional correctness, but will also be influenced and directed by this same sovereign power. The latter will have to earn their social position over time through its behaviour, but will also enjoy an operational freedom which only the autonomy from the established power confers. In both cases it will no longer be possible to demand an automatic or permanent ethical and moral "recognition", let's say "by right". It will be necessary to be open to a permanent and continuous scrutiny by their peers in a just and healthy *de facto* competition in an open and dynamic forum, to which everyone has access but few manage survive in dignity. Such an evolutionary and selective dynamic is realized through the ancient and original values which have always been the foundation of the concept of aristocracy and nobility, which were conferred originally was not only by birth but also for merit on the battlefield. A battle today largely transferred from the lawns and city walls to the classrooms and scientific laboratories where knowledge is born and the positive power of Good Government is rooted.

It will be necessary to make a comparison between the meritorious systems that exist in monarchical countries, where the nobility is still protected and recognized and in which noble elements still remain at a residual level, and new forms of recognition of merit apt to continue and preserve the root values of nobility also in modern republican sovereign states, evaluating how important are these remnants of nobility in the modern world.

Today we need more than ever access to every possible way to stimulate, support and gratify those who can, who must, who have the skills and moral obligation to operate positively in their society. We must contrast anonymous collectivism and instead positively discriminate and support persons which have a positive social behaviour, so that by emerging themselves they may help to advance those, from which they emerged.