

IF - The Seat of Responsibility and Trust

By Gene Bueno '59



The position of the Illustrious Fellow is nothing more than a RESPONSIBILITY---from the root word, RESPOND---to be answerable to a primary cause (the Fraternity). And in the same way, it is a symbol of TRUST, as it is a seat of authority. One occupying it must be humbled by that trust alone, given by his brothers in the Fraternity.

Fellow Christian Monsod'55 once said in his message, "We take too literally the saying that 'the word of the IF is law'. That is not a power, that is a responsibility." Why are we increasingly reminded of this in the Fraternity today? Because it is time to revisit the position and shape it back to what the Upsilon Sigma Phi STANDS for.

Christian continues, "Indeed, the absolute power of IF can be intoxicating, but not to someone who wields it with responsibility and respect for the sentiments of the brods. That power should be wielded with great circumspection keeping in mind the trust reposed upon the wielder by his fraternity brothers, the alumni included. The word of the IF is law. But if it is to be exercised in harmful ways, let that law be stricken down, for the good of the Fraternity transcends the good of the IF."

To understand it as such, we have to know how the dictum, "The Word of the IF is (the) LAW"---which is at the center of it---came into existence.

Fellow Verden Dangilan'51 has a written account of this in the book, *The Upsilon at Los Banos Handbook 2007*, a 'project' of the USPLBAA, written and compiled by him. (I would recommend it as a good reading especially to a new IF. It is a great source of knowledge about the Fraternity.) He says that, firstly, there was the Constitution of the University Students Fraternity (the Upsilon Sigma Phi) which was formally organized in 1920.

"The existence of this fundamental document was affirmed in a 1926 issue of the *Philippine Collegian* (found in the archives of the University library) in a caption to a photograph of the 1926 Dignitaries which read, 'the Constitution and By-Laws of the Fellowship prohibit the public announcement of its activities, believing that self-advertisement corrupts the individual.'"

Unfortunately, most of the early documents and records, including the original copy of the Constitution, were either lost or destroyed during World War II.

But, fortunately, as Brod Verden says, "Some years after the war, there was

published in the Upsilon Sigma Phi an Anniversary Handbook to commemorate the Fraternity's 32nd anniversary, 1949-50, which featured a copy of the Constitution and By-Laws, from the

personal file of Fellow Jorge Gonzalez, batch of 1941. He had returned to the University to resume his interrupted law studies and was ELECTED Illustrious Fellow of Diliman Resident Chapter in 1949. In that same year, the Los Banos Resident Chapter was founded and as part of the ceremonies, a copy of the Constitution and By-Laws was handed over to Fellow David Daza'48, Illustrious Fellow for the new Chapter."

When Brod Verden became the IF of Los Banos Chapter in 1952-53, the same copy of the Constitution was handed down to him, just as he turned it over to his successor. To this day, he says, "the Los Banos Resident Chapter still has a copy of the Constitution and By-Laws in its files."

And here is a turning point: at some time, "the Diliman Chapter has lost or cannot locate its copy of the Constitution and By-Laws of the Fraternity, for which reasons, most latter-day Fellows are not aware of such document." Apparently, this is the time the Diliman Chapter started the Traditions, which we found, did not unduly detract from the purpose, the ideals, the values, the responsibilities outlined in the Constitution.

But it is curious why the Diliman Chapter did not look to the Los Banos Chapter for a copy, as it is curious why the Los Banos Chapter simply adopted the "new power" of the IF---started in Diliman.

I have not known of any IF before---even as far back as 1958, and after myself, as IF in 1964---who needed to consult the written Constitution and By-Laws during his term. One would imagine that---between 1949, the year that Fellow Jorge Gonzales was the IF, and the year 1958, when Fellow Doming Santiago'53 was IF---the CBL, sometime in that short 50's decade, have ceased to be consulted. This could very well have happened under a strong, confident, visionary leadership. And the Fraternity, that have always moved as one, might have seen no need to look into written rules to pursue meaningful creative activities and other prestigious positions in the campus. But this does not mean that we altogether have thrown away our Constitution.

In those glory years of the 50s, the Upsilon relied heavily on the Credo for yearly policy guidance. Where the CBL speaks of rules, the Credo speaks of purpose. It generally maps out the Fraternity program and activities for the year.

In time, the relevance and success of the IF is measured up to the Credo. There was simply much to be done along its pathways in one school year. Perhaps, in the overwhelming desire to accomplish much, it brought about the need to cut corners in making decisions. And the IF is there in the center to act with absolute conviction according to the wishes and the spirit of the Brotherhood.

The heavy academic load alone would make one skip endless days dealing with meetings, and reviews and the eternal brainstorming. In many urgent instances, it would seem that the democratic steps laid out in the CBL became a method of achieving nothing much by doing a lot! And so...we trust the well-meaning IF to make an expeditious decision under the dictum,

"The Word of the IF is (the) Law," and to expect the "LAW" to be efficiently carried out whenever he would assign tasks to the Fraternity or to individual members.

A decisive IF is always aware that there is much to be done to advance the interest of the Fraternity in a given year. He is there to protect its name, to preserve its order, to promote fellowship, and to prepare it to engage in worthwhile activities in and out of the campus. It is an enormous responsibility and trust. And he is well-equipped to carve it with the sword--- "The Word of the IF is Law"---which cuts only for the Fraternity, and for nothing else.

If it is necessary for the IF to tell everyone that "the Word of the IF is (the) Law," then it is not. In the Fraternity, it is law only because the Brotherhood says and obeys it as law. There lies the limitation of this power...the length of its functional leash. This function is first defined in the Constitution. And even essentially expanded today by (unwritten) Tradition, the exercise of it is only for the interest of the Fraternity.

But others have a different idea of the range of the dictum's reach. They believe it is a limitless power, which makes it as empty as writing a big amount on a check beyond its limited account. To them the IF can do whatever he wants, no matter that he wants only to derive the greatest pleasure of having his own wayward will obeyed. This kind of heady power attracts as much as mob moths are to a candle flame. Thus, we saw one covertly sought it even when he was not a "resident," risking a good name to burn in the end. And how many more would be seduced by it?

Yet we know it is there only as a flame to give light---a beacon of unity and order---an efficient tool in the hands of a well-meaning leader, even as it

attracts 'mob bosses' and their like-minded alliances. Sadly, we are not without them in our ranks.

To others, what appears to be a 'royal privilege makes them turn the position into a throne. And as if to inspire a cultist respect, for the position or for themselves, a few have adopted "1918" as their batch. One would think that by now we should be calling the IF-- "Your Royal Highness My Most Highly Worshipped Illustrious Fellow (supply the name)'18."

Maybe this sounds exaggerated today. But given the gauche penchant for tinsel buntings with this thought, it's not too far off when this form of title will find usage in referring to the IF. Perhaps, it will not happen in our time. But we certainly don't need it in the Upsilon at anytime.

And so with all the other spin-off benefits one would think are attached to the position. For instance: spreading the largesse by appointing as many as four (and counting) brods in one position in the Fellowship Council; or having other brods carry his luggage; or holding his umbrella while following on foot his royal highness, the IF, etc. Upsilonians have seen, to their dismay, many instances of this ego-inflating kind of abuse---a practice that is never acceptable.

It is said that all men would be tyrants if they could. Alas, the seat of the IF is not that kind of training ground. It is not a royal toy for a vain aspiring despot. Rather, it is a position to work for the greater good of the Upsilon Sigma Phi.