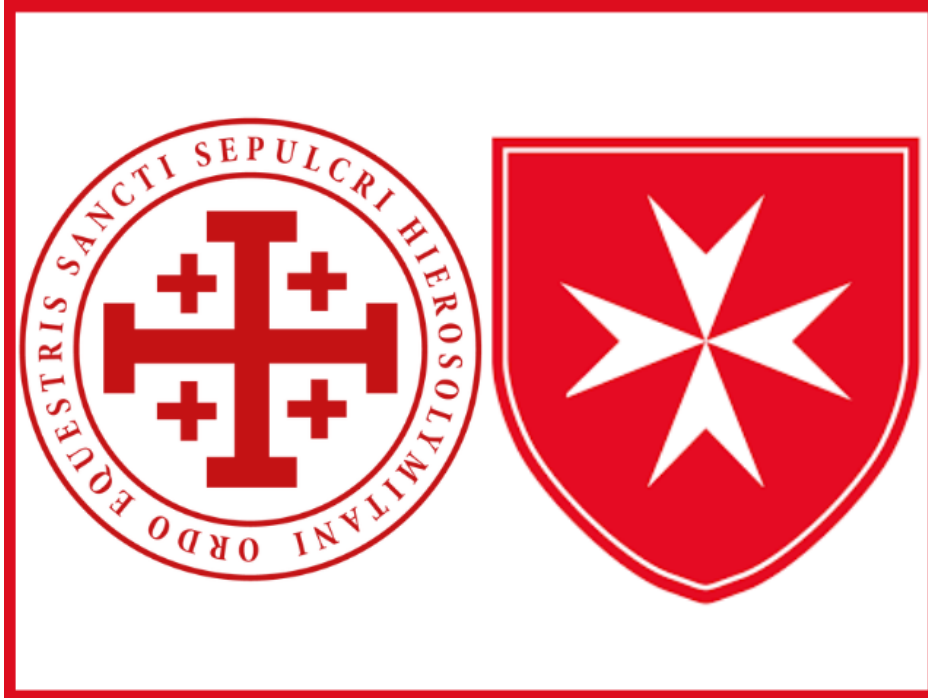




GRAND MAGISTERIUM – VATICAN
EQUESTRIAN ORDER OF
THE HOLY SEPULCHRE OF JERUSALEM

At the service of the living stones in the Holy Land

Two Orders at the Service of the Church



The Sovereign Military Order of Malta and the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem are the only two chivalric Orders recognized by the Church. The two orders are ancient institutions with deep historical roots, which are spiritually linked to Jerusalem, and both committed to serving the Church. However, some fundamental and profound differences distinguish the two Orders. The attribution of the term “military” to the former and “equestrian” to the latter is not the only difference between the two institutions, which are often confused in the collective imagination. Despite their shared Jerusalemite specificity, there are many other more significant distinctions.

The Order of Malta is a sovereign subject of international law, with its own independent legal system, which is structured according to the usual division of state powers (legislative, executive, and judicial). It therefore has its own constitution, government, judiciary, and an active and passive diplomatic network. In addition, it concludes international agreements, issues passports, mints coins, issues stamps, and registers vehicles with the SMOM license plate. Its headquarters are in Rome, where it enjoys extraterritorial status. A Grand Master, who is both the sovereign and religious superior and presides over a Sovereign Council, has governed the Order of Malta for several centuries. The Order, with its 13,500 members, is located throughout the world, and divided into three classes, the first of which involves the profession of vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Therefore, the Order of Malta is led in every respect by religious members, according to the principles of canon law, who, as such, must obey the Pope.

The Knights of the Holy Sepulchre have for centuries repeated a “collatio” in Jerusalem that had been received elsewhere. They are faithful to the Church, and linked to the Chapter of the Canons, but not organized into a structured and organized militia. Blessed Pope Pius IX reformed the Knights of the

Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem in 1847, and since then it has formed an Order that is a Central Body of the Church and a juridical person of canon law, which is registered in the Pontifical Yearbook. The Pope himself held the role of Grand Master for many years, but later delegated this power to a cardinal appointed by him. The mandate is territorially confined to the Holy Land. A Grand Master governs the Order with assistance from a lay Governor General, appointed by him, and by a Grand Magisterium whose members are likewise appointed by him. The Order is present on all five continents with 30,000 members, the majority of whom are laypeople with a limited number of clergy, who serve in a spiritual leadership role. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre is based in the Vatican and uses vehicles with the SCV license plate of the Vatican City State.

Both The Sovereign Military Order of Malta and the Equestrian Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem Orders have ancient historical roots and are engaged in charitable works in the service of the Church, but with different methods and objectives. The Sovereign Military Order of Malta conducts humanitarian and charitable activities worldwide, particularly focusing on hospital assistance and aid to victims of conflicts or natural disasters, with the help of its numerous employees and volunteers. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre, on the other hand, has been assigned by the Popes the ongoing task of supporting the Christian presence in the Holy Land through the voluntary contributions of its members. These tasks involve financing schools, parishes, hospitals, and other charitable institutions in Israel, Palestine, Jordan, and Cyprus, primarily through the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem. Despite the differences in objectives, there is no opposition between the two Orders. The complex historical events of the past led to rivalries and moments of tension, but today the common charitable mission fosters collaboration and joint participation in charitable initiatives. There are even cases of knights belonging to both Orders. The two Grand Masters at the helm maintain a cordial relationship.

An in-depth look at the respective frameworks and activities, however, reveals some important elements that diminish the similarities and highlight the differences.

The Sovereign Military Order of Malta's state character is limited by the absence of its own territory since 1798. The autonomy of certain powers or prerogatives is objectively diminished by the religious nature of its leadership. Although elected internally, its leaders are, in fact, bound by an obedience to the Holy See, as emerged in 1953 with a ruling from a Cardinal's Tribunal, and again in recent years when the Pope himself imposed reforms and promulgated a new constitution of his own design. The Order of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem does not suffer from this ambiguity, as it is a lay institution institutionally integrated into the Roman Curia and structurally organized within the hierarchical system of the Church, which requires appointments from above and excludes forms of elective power.

As an international actor and observer member in the General Assembly of the United Nations and other International Organizations, the Sovereign Military Order of Malta can play an important diplomatic role, either autonomously or in support of the Apostolic Nunciatures (or the interests of the Vatican where the Nunciatures are absent). It can provide valuable information and advice on crises around the world. This role does not belong to the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, which is not a political-diplomatic subject, and which can only more subtly support forms of reconciliation and the initiation of peaceful dialogue in its area of competence. This is the hope expressed by the leadership of the Order, which is achievable through the education inspired by the principles of the Gospel. This instruction is provided in the schools of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, and attended by students of all faiths. The apolitical nature of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre may make it a more acceptable interlocutor in the moral reconstruction work in the Holy Land and, due to its institutional connection with the Church, it facilitates ecumenical and interreligious dialogue. Thus, both Orders, despite their different specificities and weights, contribute to strengthening the action of the Church in crisis areas.

What are the characteristics of the members belonging to the two Orders? It is assumed that the condition for admission to both is the profession of the Catholic faith and exemplary conduct. In the

Sovereign Military Order of Malta, for the highest ranks, belonging to the First Class, the vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience is required; for the members of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, such a requirement does not exist, but there is an obligation of charitable service, with a continuous commitment, towards the mother Church of Jerusalem.

Some differences also emerge in the honorific aspects. The Sovereign Military Order of Malta, in addition to the various grades that characterize the three classes of its members, can confer honors (the Pro Merito Melitensi Order in various degrees) to civilians, military personnel, and ecclesiastics who are not members of the Order. Similarly, the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, aside from the various grades of its members, can confer honorifics such as the Order of Merit and the Palm of Jerusalem. However, there is a difference in how their insignia is displayed. The decorations of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta do not require authorization to be worn in Italy, following a specific agreement between the two governments; the decorations of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre require a specific authorization decree from the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

It is interesting to examine the status of female presence in the two Orders. In the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, women have historically played an important role in convents of religious women who supported the presence of knights and were an integral part of the Order's territorial structure. There are some nuns linked to the Order who even remained on the island of Malta when Napoleon Bonaparte expelled the knights in 1798. Today, women are part of the second and third classes and support the mission of the Order by organizing pilgrimages and assisting the sick. However, they are not present in the government. In the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, women were admitted in 1888 at the behest of Pope Leo XIII. Since then, they have been full members without distinction, and many women now hold senior positions, and lead Lieutenancies or serve within the Grand Magisterium itself. The only difference distinguishing them from the knights of the Order is the color of the mantle and the symbols used during the prayer vigil preceding the investiture.

The historical relationship between the two Orders has experienced alternating moments. In 1479, an attempt was made to absorb the assets of the Chapter of the Canons of the Holy Sepulchre into the Sovereign Military Order of Malta, with a bull from Pope Innocent VIII, but this had no effect due to the opposition of Emperor Maximilian and other sovereigns. In 1930, the Order of Malta raised several issues regarding the legitimacy of the attributes and prerogatives of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, which were submitted to the Sacred Congregation of Ceremonial. In the early 1950s, another attempt was made to unify the two Orders by Cardinal Canali, who simultaneously held the positions of Grand Prior of the Order of Malta and Grand Master of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre. Today, the relations between the two Orders are very cordial at all levels, and cooperation on the ground is frequent. A significant example is the recent visit to Gaza during the Israeli-Palestinian war by the Grand Prior of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre, together with the Grand Hospitaller of the Order of Malta.

The Order of Malta's motto is "Tuitio Fidei et Obsequium Pauperum" [Protection of the faith and service to the poor] which emphasizes the vocation of assistance as an element of charity in faith. The historical motto of the Order of the Holy Sepulchre is "Deus lo vult," [*God wills it*] which recalls the liberation of the Holy Sepulchre. However, recently it has become common to accompany it with "Resurrexit", which more fittingly evokes the mystery of the Resurrection of Our Lord, and the true ideal reference of the Order. The symbols and uniforms of the Order of Malta may have a more military connotation, whereas the Order of the Holy Sepulchre has effectively relegated uniforms to history and has replaced the sword with the processional cross during the investiture ceremony. This highlights for both dames and knights the spiritual component of their charitable commitment.

In conclusion, it can be said that the terms "military" and "equestrian" evoked at the beginning of this text, which characterize the two Orders, only superficially highlight that which distinguishes them. A "military order" should primarily recognize and honor courage and valor, while an "equestrian order" should focus mainly on the chivalric ethics of faith and loyalty. However, all of this appears

– in a modern view – to be quite nuanced in two institutions whose ultimate purpose is inspired by evangelical principles for both.

Amb. Leonardo Visconti di Modrone

Governor General

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