



"To Restore All Things in Christ"

## **Clarifications Regarding the Dialogue between Members of the Commission for the Laity of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and the Two Conflicting Groups of the Couples for Christ on August 28, 2007**

After hearing reports on the dialogue in Radio and TV, and reading newspaper articles about it, especially the news item on the front page of the *Inquirer* dated September 1, 2007, "We Have Vatican Support, says Meloto," I deem it my duty to make clarifications about what transpired during the above-mentioned dialogue:

First, we discussed the complaint of the group of Bro. Frank Padilla that the Couples for Christ, because of Gawad Kalinga, is "veering away from the vision/mission of CFC and from Catholic teachings and because of Gawad Kalinga enough manpower and resources are not given to the other ministries of CFC, like evangelization and catechesis." Social Action is too much stressed at the expense of spirituality and evangelization.

The group of Frank Padilla explained that Gawad Kalinga is a good project and has done much good but, on several occasions, in wanting to get more donors and partners for its projects, it is hiding its identity as a CFC project or ministry and also its connection with the Catholic Church.

They gave a number of examples of this. I will cite only two: 1<sup>st</sup>: Malyn Alonso who has been working for 4 years as project director in the Gawad Kalinga in Brookside, Payatas, Quezon City reported the following during the dialogue:

She was one of the group of Gawad Kalinga leaders who went to a prospective donor organization. She was at that time wearing her CFC ID. When they were about to enter the said organization's office, she was told to remove her ID. The reason given was that the prospective donor might not like to give to a project that is identified with a religious organization. Nobody from the group of Bro. Joe Tale denied this report.

Mimi David, head of the Education Ministry of CFC, paraphrased orally during the dialogue the following written report she made: When we were asked by the Children's Rosary Crusade to have our children (Sibol, Sagip) participate in this activity, I informed a top leader for help in mobilization and support. His reply: "Let us pray about it. We don't like our partners to see us as sectarian and identified with the Church." I was surprised and pained at this response and had to call Frank Padilla



"To Restore All Things in Christ"

immediately as the GK Board Chairman, to which he said, "I will talk to him. You continue with the engagement."

The leader, mentioned by Mimi David, was present in the dialogue. He said that he had not told Mimi David: "We don't like our partners to see us as sectarian and identified with the Church." It is a pity that Mimi David was no more present when the leader denied her statement. But she is standing by her words and is ready to face the afore-mentioned leader any time.

During the discussion, it was pointed out to the group of Bro. Joe Tale that they themselves emphasized that Gawad Kalinga is a child of CFC, is a ministry of CFC and that "CFC is the heart of Gawad Kalinga" and that Gawad Kalinga cannot be separated from CFC. If so, then Gawad Kalinga should adhere to the vision/mission of CFC, and to the CFC statutes which were approved by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines and by the Pontifical Council for the Laity of the Vatican. The first paragraph (Number 1.1) of the Statutes of the Couples for Christ under the heading "Nature and Purpose" says: "*COUPLES FOR CHRIST (CFC) is a private international association of the faithful of pontifical right recognized by the Pontifical Council of the Laity. It is committed to the work of global evangelization and renewal, with the goal of winning the world for Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit.*" To evangelize is to follow the command of Our Lord Jesus: "Make disciples of all nations." Therefore CFC should not downplay or downgrade this first purpose of CFC for the sake of getting more donors or partners. Gawad Kalinga was established by CFC because of the teachings and values of CFC and the Catholic Church. It was the teachings of CFC and the Catholic Church that inspired CFC members, who provide most of the manpower in Gawad Kalinga, to work for the poor through Gawad Kalinga. So, Gawad Kalinga should not downplay or hide its identity as a CFC ministry and its connection with the Catholic Church. Gawad Kalinga was meant to be a witness to Christ, namely, that it was the teachings of Jesus Christ and love for Him that made people work for the poor in Gawad Kalinga. In this way, people will be attracted to Christ.

It was further explained that CFC is not an ecumenical association, in the sense that it is composed of different religions on equal footing. The CFC Statutes, no. 9.1, says: "*COUPLES FOR CHRIST is a Catholic community, though open to membership by non-Catholic Christians.*" Statute 9.61 says: "*COUPLES FOR CHRIST will follow whatever guidelines on relationship with non-Catholics that the bishop may have for his diocese.*"

Another complaint of the group of Bro. Frank Padilla was that Gawad Kalinga "was accepting donations even from corporations manufacturing contraceptives,



"To Restore All Things in Christ"

contradicting the CFC's pro-life stance." (Inquirer, "Bishops to Discuss Couples for Christ Split," page A23, August 28, 2007) Tony Meloto's answer to this in the same Inquirer's news item proves that this complaint is true. He says: "GK is nonpartisan. We do not take any side in building a nation in the same manner that we do not pass judgment on any corporation that we engage. We do not even ask them what their (corporations) products are as long as they want to help." The Statutes of CFC, no. 9.42, says: "COUPLES FOR CHRIST will conform to and support official and orthodox Church teachings and stands on issues." Receiving funds from drug companies that produce contraceptives is against Church teaching and policy.

Couples for Christ, together with its ministries, was founded primarily to "make disciples of all nations", to build up the Kingdom of Christ, not just for "building a nation." If Gawad Kalinga wants to operate more freely and more broadly than the vision/mission and nature of CFC will allow, then let it be a civic organization or an organization with a vision/mission and nature different from that of CFC.

It dawned on me sometime after the dialogue that the couple Frank Padilla and Gerry Padilla are members of the Pontifical Council for Family of the Vatican. This Council is headed by Cardinal Trujillo and is composed of bishops, priests, and lay people. Frank and Gerry Padilla were appointed to this Council mainly because Frank was then the "head" of CFC. The Pontifical Council for the Family is against receiving funds from corporations that produce artificial contraceptives. So there is an additional reason that urges Bro. Frank Padilla to object against receiving donations from drug companies that produce contraceptives.

The group of Bro. Joe Tale said that these cases of veering away from the vision/mission of CFC and some teachings of the Catholic Church are isolated cases. This does not happen in most Gawad Kalinga projects in the country. The group committed themselves to look into the matter and make whatever corrections are needed. But, it was pointed out to them that, although these cases may be isolated, they are important because they involve their top leaders in Gawad Kalinga and their wrong mind-set can easily influence the members.

The group of Bro. Joe Tale also said that these complaints can be solved without the group of Bro. Frank Padilla getting out of the CFC. Bro. Frank Padilla answered that they have aired these complaints long enough but the situation is still the same.

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines has no authority over the Couples for Christ in the national level. It can only make recommendations to the



"To Restore All Things in Christ"

Couples for Christ, not impositions. Only the Vatican, through the Pontifical Council of the Laity, has authority over it in the national and international level. But every diocesan bishop has authority over it in his diocese. Each diocesan bishop has power to deny permission to CFC to function in his diocese, even if the association is international.

But the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines, through the Commission for the Laity, has the duty to inform the Pontifical Council of the Laity about the CFC regarding matters that it deems to be serious. Since Bro. Joe Tale and the CFC Council committed to stop the practice of Gawad Kalinga from accepting funds from companies that produce contraceptives, the CBCP Commission for the Laity will not make any report about this to the Pontifical Council for the Laity. In the light of this, the original CFC, with Gawad Kalinga as one of its ministries, retains its recognition as an international private association of the faithful, which was given by the Pontifical Council for the Laity in 2005. It also retains its recognition as a national private association of the faithful, which was given by the CBCP in 1996.

Then the group of Bro. Joe Tale was asked whether they have any complaints regarding financial anomalies against the group of Bro. Frank Padilla. They said, "None". The group of Bro. Frank Padilla had also no complaint regarding financial anomalies against the group of Bro. Joe Tale.

Finally, we discussed whether the two groups can unite. After exchange of views, the two groups decided that "the most acceptable option at the moment is to separate ways due to some clear differences in mission, charism, and other points of deep disagreement. However, both parties are not closing the door on remaining as one united CFC." Another reason given for the temporary separation is to diffuse the heightened and mounting tension and animosities between the two groups caused by accusations hurled against each other.

The original CFC, with Gawad Kalinga among its ministries, under the leadership of Bro. Joe Tale continues as a national and international private association of the faithful.

The group of Bro. Frank Padilla will form the Couples for Christ for Family and Life. In order to get official recognition from the Church, the new Couples for Christ for Family and Life should start as a diocesan association, then later can apply for recognition as a national association if it has branches in other dioceses and even later as an international association.\* As a diocesan association, it can go to other dioceses provided the bishop of the place permits.



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"To Restore All Things in Christ"

The group of Bro. Joe Tale said that the new group should not use the name, Couples for Christ for Family and Life because it will confuse the people. It was pointed out that as long as the names are explained it will not cause confusion. In the Philippines, we have Marriage Encounter and Worldwide Marriage Encounter, Mother Butler's Guild and Mother Butler's Mission Guild. The Franciscans have OFM, OFM Capuchins, OFM Conventuals. Among the Carmelites there are Order of Carmelites and Order of Carmelites Discalced.

The dialogue ended with the participants giving one another the sign of peace.

This is not the minutes of the dialogue but a clarification of important things that happened or were said in the dialogue. I am doing this because some news reports and columnists have misinterpreted some things that transpired or were said in the dialogue.

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