

The following is the text of an article by His Excellency, Most Rev. Gabriel V. Reyes, D.D., Chairman of the Commission for the Laity of the CBCP and Bishop of the Diocese of Antipolo, that appeared on Page A17 of the June 11, 2008 issue of the Philippine Daily Inquirer.

**Explanation and Defense of the Directives of Stanislaw Cardinal Rylko,
President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity,
to the Gawad Kalinga of the Couples for Christ**

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First of all, it is good to stress that the directives of Cardinal Rylko are not against the work of Gawad Kalinga for the poor. They exhort Gawad Kalinga to go on with its good work but it should correct some mistakes, namely, the over-emphasis of social work at the expense of evangelization and spiritual formation of the family; and the acceptance of funds from pharmaceutical companies that produce contraceptives.

The directives of Cardinal Rylko are the same as the guidance that the CBCP Commission for the Laity gave to Gawad Kalinga. The Commission for the Laity also points out that these mistakes mentioned above make Gawad Kalinga deviate from the nature and purpose of Couples for Christ and from the statutes of CFC which were approved by the Pontifical Council of the Laity.

The first directive of Cardinal Rylko is that Gawad Kalinga should not over-emphasize social work at the expense of evangelization and on-going spiritual formation of the family. The family that is meant here is first of all the families of the CFC members themselves who are doing social work in Gawad Kalinga. Gawad Kalinga is a ministry of CFC and most of the workers in Gawad Kalinga are CFC members. The Statutes of Couples for Christ, in No. 2 Vision and Mission, says: 2:1 "...CFC is called to bring families back to the plan of God. It is called to bring the Lord's strength and light to those who are struggling to be truly Christian families in the modern world." 2:2 "Couples for Christ works for family renewal at various levels – the individual, the family, the larger community."

Some CFC Couples have told me that because of their work in Gawad Kalinga they have no more time for their own prayer meeting where they undergo their own evangelization, on-going formation, and spiritual nourishment. This neglect of their on-going evangelization and spiritual formation is against the CFC statutes and bad for their own Christian life and growth in it.

We can compare this guidance to Gawad Kalinga of not over-emphasizing social work to the guidance to our priests during the late sixties, the seventies, and during the years of martial law when social activism was very much emphasized in the Church in the Philippines. The priests were reminded that they should work for the poor and the

oppressed but they should not neglect their life of prayer and on-going spiritual formation. They were warned that if they neglect their spiritual life because of too much activism, they will unknowingly imbibe values which run counter to their Christian and priestly life. Many of those who were much involved in social activism did not listen to this advice. Many of these priests left the priesthood. Some of them became Marxists, a few became commanders of the NPA.

What happened to a number of activist priests described above can also happen to the CFC members who are working in Gawad Kalinga, if they over-emphasize social work to the neglect of their own on-going evangelization and spiritual formation. Without their knowing it, they imbibe values which run counter to Christian values and which go against the CFC nature, purpose and vision/mission. And this has happened. For example, there were instances when Gawad Kalinga leaders will hide their identity as Couples for Christ when they are applying for funding from corporations who will not give to religious organizations. Another example, a Gawad Kalinga leader was against sending the children (Sibol, Sagip) in Gawad Kalinga villages to a Children's Rosary Rally because he did not want "our partners to see Gawad Kalinga as sectarian and identified with the Church." I would like to stress, however, that the majority of CFC members working in Gawad Kalinga are not of this mind-set. But, these cases, although few, involve the leaders of Gawad Kalinga and their wrong mind-set can easily influence the members.

Gawad Kalinga was established by the Couples for Christ because they love Christ and want to love Christ in the poor and because they want to give witness to Christ through social work. Through Gawad Kalinga, the CFC aims to proclaim to people that Christ must be good because He made the CFC do the good work in Gawad Kalinga. In this way the CFC will attract people to Him. How can Gawad Kalinga be a witness to Christ if the leaders hide its identity as a ministry of the Couples for Christ because they want to get donations from companies or organizations that will not give to religious organizations?

In the news item of the Philippine Daily Inquirer of August 28, 2007, entitled "Bishops to Discuss Couples for Christ Split," Tony Meloto was asked why Gawad Kalinga "was accepting donations even from corporations manufacturing contraceptives, contradicting the CFC's pro-life stance." He answered: "GK is non-partisan. We do not take any side in building a nation in the same manner that we do not pass judgment on any corporation we engage. We do not even ask them what their (corporations) products are as long as they want to help." In the news item of the ABS-CBN News Online, April 16, 2008, entitled "Vatican admonishes Couples for Christ over Gawad Kalinga," Tony Meloto was told that "the Vatican disapproved of CFC's 'over-emphasis on social work' and Gawad Kalinga's openness to donations from groups that promote artificial family planning." His answer was "Gawad Kalinga's mission is to build a nation... We will just continue to work." Tony Meloto's answers and statements in newspapers implied that he does not agree that GK is over-emphasizing social work at the expense of evangelization and spirituality and that for him it is okay to accept donations from pharmaceutical companies that produce contraceptives. One of the main reasons he gives is that the mission of Gawad Kalinga is to build a nation.

Gawad Kalinga is a ministry of the Couples for Christ. Like Couples for Christ, its mission is not just to build a nation but to build the Kingdom of God. Its mission is to evangelize, to bring people to Christ, the Savior. Gawad Kalinga, as a ministry of CFC, is not a civic or secular agency. It is a ministry of a religious organization that believes in and promotes the values of Christ. Gawad Kalinga should not be “non-partisan” with regards to Christ and His values. It is good to build a nation but Gawad Kalinga, as a Christian organization, should build a nation according to the values of Christ. According to the magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church), contraception and abortion (some contraceptive pills are abortifacient) are sinful, are against the values of Christ. Therefore it is wrong to accept donations from pharmaceutical companies that produce contraceptives.

Mr. Tony Meloto is the real leader in Gawad Kalinga. It is but proper to tell him that his mind-set regarding the mission of Gawad Kalinga is veering away from the vision and mission that Couples for Christ has given to Gawad Kalinga. CFC’s Gawad Kalinga is helping the poor because of love for Christ. It should never happen that GK will abandon the values of Christ because of its wanting to help the poor.

Above, I said that, in the directive that Couples for Christ should not over-emphasize social work at the expense of the evangelization and on-going spiritual formation of the family, the family that is meant is first of all the families of the CFC members who are working in Gawad Kalinga. In this directive, the families of the beneficiaries are also meant.

Some are against the directive not to over-emphasize social work at the expense of evangelization and spiritual formation of the family because they say that, as you cannot preach to an empty stomach, you should not speak about spiritual matters to people who lack decent housing.

I beg to disagree. I think we should help the beneficiaries of Gawad Kalinga in their spiritual and material needs at the same time. Work for the material needs of the poor and work for their spiritual needs should proceed hand in hand. Of course, depending on the situation, there are times when one should stress social work more but evangelization should never be neglected. The poor are already deprived of food and decent shelter, why should we deprive them of the word of God, which is food for their hearts and minds and which will give them hope and strength in their difficult situation. Sister Marlene, a German Little Sister of Jesus, who has been living with the poor in the Philippines, once said: “There is nothing wrong in talking about God to a man who has an empty stomach, provided your stomach is also empty and you try to help him find food.”

I have been assigned in some parishes in Metro Manila as a parochial vicar and, later, as parish priest. Through our parish social action center and through my pastoral ministry (sick calls, neighborhood masses, block rosary, etc), I was also in contact with the poor who do not have decent housing or are living over “stinking esteros.” I found the great majority of them open to God and spiritual matters, except those who never

heard about God or were never catechized or have been indoctrinated by Marxists. Many people who flock to the “Poon Nazareno” in Quiapo Church or to the Sto. Niño in Tondo do not have decent housing.

The Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) in nos. 154-185 speaks about integral evangelization and the elements composing it, namely, catechesis, worship, and social apostolate. In No. 182, it says, “...it must be stressed that no true renewal can happen in one area (e.g. catechesis) in isolation from the other areas (worship and social apostolate). Any genuine renewal must affect all three areas in their inter-relationship.” “Without education towards maturity in the faith, the social apostolate will become activism and will fall prey to the temptations of unchristian ideologies.”^(No. 183) In No. 185, it continues, “Finally the social apostolate without worship will lose its source of strength...” Pope Benedict XVI says in “Deus Caritas Est” (God is Love) No. 25, “a] The Church’s deepest nature is expressed in her three-fold responsibility: of proclaiming the word of God (kerygma-martyria), celebrating the sacrament (leitourgia), and exercising the ministry of charity (diakonia). These duties presuppose each other and are inseparable.”

Regarding the issue of receiving funds from pharmaceutical companies that produce contraceptives, let me first quote from the letter to me of the late Cardinal Trujillo, the former President of the Pontifical Council for Family and Life, dated November 26, 2007:

“Accepting donations from those who promote abortion and contraception will compromise the Gospel of the Family and of Life, and will greatly harm our efforts to strengthen and defend the family and life; hence, it should not be done.”

“First, in this concrete case, the funds offered also come from actions that are morally evil, abortion and contraception. Accepting such funding creates confusion among the faithful, as they give the impression that abortion and the production, distribution, and use of contraceptives and abortifacients are acceptable practices. Besides, in their advancements and promotional materials, these companies could say that they help the Catholic Church, and thus give the false idea that their contraceptive and abortion causing products and services are acceptable.”

“Second, the risk exists for the pro-family groups receiving similar funding to be at least silent about the unacceptability of such products.”

“Third, it would provide those working against the family grounds for extremely persuasive criticism to attack and discredit Church organizations and the Church herself – especially through charges of incoherence and insincerity.”

People who find nothing wrong in receiving funds from pharmaceutical companies that produce contraceptives reason in this way: If a starving man may steal when stealing is the only way for him to get food and escape imminent death, then Gawad Kalinga may also receive funds from pharmaceutical companies that produce contraceptives in order to provide housing to people in need of decent housing.

The reasoning is wrong because the two situations they cite are not the same. First,

the funds of the pharmaceutical company that produces contraceptives are not the only means to provide housing to the beneficiaries of Gawad Kalinga. There are many partner corporations and groups giving funds to Gawad Kalinga for its housing project. I am sure more groups will be willing to help, if asked. Gawad Kalinga's work will not be significantly affected if they stop receiving funds from companies that produce contraceptives. Second, the beneficiaries of GK, who lack decent housing, are not in imminent danger of death. They have been living in these houses for years. Their situation is not as desperate as the man who is allowed to steal because he is in imminent danger of death and the only solution to avoid death is to steal. So, there is no justifying reason for Gawad Kalinga to do something wrong, that is, receive funds from pharmaceutical companies that produce contraceptives, especially when there are so many good means available in order to get funds for the housing project.

This directive to the Gawad Kalinga to stop receiving "objectionable" funds is similar to the "collective policy of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines regarding gambling". In its "CBCP Statement on Gambling," dated January 23, 2005, it says:

"3. Therefore, the CBCP has made it a collective policy: a] b] c] To refrain from soliciting or receiving funds from illegal or legal gambling so as not to promote a culture of gambling; and d] To encourage Church personnel and Church institutions to refrain from doing the same, even when the objective may be that of helping the poor."

Those who say that it is all right for Gawad Kalinga to receive funds from pharmaceutical companies that produce contraceptives in order to provide housing for the poor cite another reason, namely, the Latin proverb: "*Primum est vivere, deinde philosophare*" – "to stay alive comes first before philosophizing." But, contraceptives are not just a matter of philosophizing. It is also a matter of "staying alive." Some contraceptives are abortifacient; they kill people.

Before I end, I would like to point out that Mr. Tony Meloto and some columnists, knowingly or unknowingly, distort the directives of Cardinal Rylko. By the way they comment on the directives, they make people think that the directives are against the work of Gawad Kalinga for the poor. The directives are not against Gawad Kalinga. Gawad Kalinga should continue its very good work. The directives are just making some corrections in Gawad Kalinga, namely, that Gawad Kalinga should not over-emphasize social work at the expense of the evangelization and spiritual formation of the family and that GK should stop receiving funds from pharmaceutical companies that produce contraceptives.