

Press Release

ONE MAN'S VIEW

By Nonoy Mendoza

A Chat With Frank Padilla

Founder of Couples for Christ Foundation for Family and Life

WASHINGTON, D.C., Sept. 8 - I just had dinner with Frank Padilla of Manila, one of the most interesting and renowned Filipino positive image builder of our generation. We had a chat at the residence of Jim and Tess Taylor of South Arlington, Virginia. He and his wife, Gerry, are traveling to different areas in the United States, Canada and Europe where the once intact Couples For Christ with more than million members are confronted with the spectre of separation between those who prefer evangelization and family and those who wish to continue Gawad Kalinga's over-arching stress on CFC.

Having met Frank on several occasions during the time when I was active in CFC, his mild mannerism has always disarmed me in our conversations. He has not changed a bit except for some evidence of riper age on his forehead. He mentioned his *Restoration Movement*, which this writer heartily endorses. I mentioned to Frank that I will be filing a report of our conversation in our *Global Pinoy Online News* wide a global distributions giving a brief explanation as interpreted by the writer.

“The CFC should go back to evangelization” began Frank. He said CFCs are better as evangelizers rather than fundraisers for social developments,” referring obviously to Gawad Kalinga (GK). Last Easter Sunday, Frank Padilla enumerated 13 reasons why CFC should rationalize its role in GK and claimed that because of GK, CFC had started to veer away from its original charism which is evangelization and family life. With that platform, he organized a “restoration movement” inside Couples for Christ, a gesture that was clearly misunderstood by the present CFC International Council. Not only ignoring his recommendations, the powers-that-be of CFC/GK fired Frank as International Director, by email.

Left with no more alternative and upon the recommendation of Philippine bishops and the Episcopal Commission on the Laity, Frank organized founded Couples for Christ Foundation for Family and Life. Frank clarified “We in CFC-FFL remain as ‘Couples for Christ.’ We have not left CFC, which is the spiritual body and international movement distinct from the Philippine corporation. What we have left is the legal entity of ‘Couples for Christ Global Mission Foundation Inc.’ We in CFC-FFL have as much right, if not more, to remain as CFC than those who have veered away from our original charism.” GK has replaced holiness with “heroism” and winning the world for Christ with “nation-building”. Thus winning souls have been subdued in favor of constructing houses. CFCs who go to GK events have also been warned to remove their IDs for fear by GK leaders that they might scare prospective partners by the fact that CFC is a faith-based organization.

Frank Padilla, one of the original 16 couples who began Couples for Christ in 1981 and who has served as its executive director for the past 26 years, said “there is nothing wrong about helping the poor, in fact it completes the gospel and we are honored to have been a great part of it, but our mission is that of an evangelistic community and our priority

is preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. We love GK but we will not change our Catholic character just because of it.”

One local CFC leader who attended the dinner reception explained that because of the stress GK has been giving CFC, the membership of the latter has dramatically dropped from over a million to about 800,000 as of end 2006. A lot of the disenchantment by members has been caused by the great demand for funds and time by the humanitarian organization on CFC at the expense of evangelization. Regular activities of CFC and its bias for family life have been disrupted by GK fundraisers and construction events.

But what broke the camel’s back, the leader said were two things: first, GK no longer discriminates where it gets funds. In an official clarification, Bishop Gabriel Reyes, chairman of CBCP’s Commission on the Laity, confirmed this in Tony Meloto’s own words that appeared in the Philippines Daily Inquirer. Meloto said: “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 that we engage. We do not even ask them what their (corporations) products are as long as they want to help.”

This drew an immediate rebuke from the bishops, who virtually placed CFC Global’s church recognitions under probation. Bishop Reyes added: “Since 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.”

GK has also allowed the proselytic Mormons to build water systems in all villages. Joe Tale, the new CFC executive director, also promised the bishops to look into it. The second factor was that GK made Tony Meloto its sole “public face” of instead of thousands of CFC volunteers who pitched in their mites and their brawns to build and maintained the villages. Tony was even given the false credit of being the founder of Gawad Kalinga instead of the ANCOP (Answering the Cry of the Poor) Foundation that began the work with the poorest of the poor in Bagong Silang. At one time, Meloto’s face was all over all Shell stations all over the country that people started asking if he were running for the Philippine presidency.

GK garnered all kinds of accolade for succeeding what other groups had tried and failed to do in the past. It was even being compared to the concept of the Grameen Bank, for which its advocate won a Nobel Peace Prize. GK and Tony Meloto themselves won separate Ramon Magsaysay awards last year. But as we speak, Meloto is bound to fall flat in his face because in less than three years, he has promised to deliver 7,000 villages and 700,000 homes and today only 22,000 homes in 1,400 communities have been built. This split within Couples for Christ is an even glaring assurance that Meloto will never get near his bloated target.

On the other hand, Frank Padilla is a simple and humble man and I support him because he is obviously in the right direction of steering the CFC die-hard members to go back to the basics of evangelization... with just a piece of GK and not consumed by it. Frank has also delivered on his word. Many years ago, he said, by the time CFC gets to be 25 years old, it will be established in 150 countries worldwide. Last year, CFC celebrated its silver anniversary and he went to the center of the stage and announced “as of tonight, CFC is already in 153 countries!” to the thundering applause of those present.

This I say to Frank: “Onward Christian Soldier!”