

CFCWDC FIRST ANNIVERSARY KEYNOTE

Delivered September 13, 2008 at St. Philip the Apostle social hall by Ado Paglinawan who is a member of CFCUSA national council, its executive secretary and the regional director for CFCUSA mid-Atlantic, southeast and the Caribbean, as well as head of mission to West and Central Africa based in Cameroon.

Good afternoon and happy anniversary!

At the middle of last year, there were three CFC corporate entities in the mid-Atlantic area, CFC Maryland, CFC Virginia and last but not least CFC Washington DC. CFCWDC was a de-facto entity incorporated only on August 15, 2007, the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady. Only CFCWDC affiliated with Couples for Christ Foundation for Family and Life, absorbing most of the members of CFC Maryland and CFC Virginia. That affiliation occurred on September 8, 2007, the birthday of Mama Mary. That is what we celebrate today.

So on this great occasion, allow me to echo and expound on some of the thoughts of Frank Padilla, our CFCFFL Servant General:

“It has been one year since the split in CFC. The challenges still are formidable. But we have been given a second chance. In Zephaniah, we confirm that God has raised us as a remnant. And remnants that we are, we need to see God’s hand clearly in order to respond properly.

“From the beginning, God’s plan for CFC was to focus on family life and evangelization. This was, and is, our charism. Worldwide, the family has been under severe attack, and the darkness of evil has spread throughout the whole world. God raised CFC in 1981 to defend the family and to proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus to the whole world.

“The first crisis was in 1993, when CFC separated from its parent community, Ligaya ng Panginoon, which basically opposed the growingly clear call to CFC to do rapid, massive and global evangelization. With the split, CFC grew rapidly and touched the lives of very many people of many different nationalities in many countries. The 1990s were golden years for the evangelistic work of CFC.

“The next crisis came last year in 2007. CFC in the last few years had been veering away from its authentic call. There came a greater focus on the social action, at the expense of proclaiming Christ and evangelization.

“We were all serving God, so why did this happen? God’s ways are of course not our ways, and we can never presume to fully understand God’s mind.

“In fact, Jesus said that he came to bring not peace but the sword, to cause division, even among relatives and household members (Mt 10:34-36). This is because there are those who will accept him and those who will reject him or his message.

“But even among those who accept Jesus and work for Him, there can be division. And so it was that we had that famous division as recorded in the book of (Acts 15:36-41) between Paul and Barnabas. Was it some deep theological argument? No, not at all! It was just whether they would bring John Mark with them on mission or not. But it was so sharp and painful a disagreement that they separated” (Acts 15:39). Yet it resulted in two missions instead of one. And God blessed both missions.

“And so through the years of Christian life and work, there have been very many separations among Christian groups, congregations and movements. Mother Teresa left her congregation and founded the Missionaries of Charity. Various religious congregations like the Franciscans, the Carmelites and many others have many groups bearing the same name with something appended to it, are independent of each other, are approved and recognized by the Church, and are doing well in their respective callings. They have all helped in expanding the work of the kingdom of heaven.

“Jesus did break the loaves and ended up multiplying the bread. In God’s hands, division can lead to multiplication! This is the spirituality of division.”

Reflection on Separation

I really appreciate the positive and uplifting note that our Servant General insofar as the issue of separation is concerned. In fact I can just confirm through events following that the Holy Spirit has been very much with us.

Many bishops, both in the Philippines and in other countries, have recognized CFC-FFL. They include Bishop Gabriel Reyes, the Spiritual Director of CFC and the Chair of the Episcopal Commission on the Laity, and Archbishop Angel Lagdameo, Archbishop of Jaro and President of the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP).

In a recent letter to us dated May 27, Cardinal Stanislaw Rylko, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity, also left it to individual bishops to recognize CFC-FFL, thus clearly allowing the existence of two CFCs.

On top of all these church recognitions, last June 5 on our petition filed almost a year before, the Philippines’ Securities & Exchange Commission (SEC) issued an Order reviving the original CFC foundation, the “COUPLES FOR CHRIST FOUNDATION INC.” thus establishing the legal right for CFCFFL to use the name “CFC”.

This is significant as it is historic. This foundation was established in 1984, nine years before CFCGK’s CFCGlobal Mission or CFCGK that was established in 1993.

CFC GK however simply cannot seem to get it. Recently, they filed a case against us in the Philippine Court of Appeals, asking the appellate court for a temporary restraining order against the decision of the Securities and Exchange Commission.

This was followed by their filing in a Federal District Court in California of a case against CFCUSA, and nine of its branches including us in CFC Washington DC Inc., with trademark infringement.

I won't discuss here the merits of our air tight defense in face of the frivolity of their moot assertions against CFCFFL in Manila and CFCUSA in California, but what I want to highlight here is, this is not how we resolve matters among Christian ecclesial movements.

Matthew 18 teaches

(15) "If your brother sins (against you), go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have won over your brother.

(16) If he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, so that 'every fact may be established on the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

(17) If he refuses to listen to them, tell the church. If he refuses to listen even to the church, then treat him as you would a Gentile or a tax collector.

After being reproved by the CBCP Ecclesial Commission, the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines, and the Vatican itself through the Pontifical Council of the Laity, CFCGK now resorted to the reverse, appealing to secular courts for relief, a matter frowned upon by Holy Scriptures and the very principles of the separation between Church and State.

1 Corinthians 6 says

(1) How can any one of you with a case against another dare to bring it to the unjust for judgment instead of to the holy ones?

(2) Do you not know that the holy ones will judge the world?

(5) I say this to shame you. Can it be that there is not one among you wise enough to be able to settle a case between brothers?

(6) But rather brother goes to court against brother, and that before unbelievers?

Two days ago, Bishop Solis of Los Angeles called both CFCGK and CFCFFL to a meeting, and in no uncertain terms told off CFCGK to abide by Scriptures and withdraw from their foolishness. All they could say was they filed the case in California because they were instructed to do so by their principals in Manila. Now they have again shot themselves on the foot, for escalating conflict in Manila to the United States.

So how do we respond to the continuing strife that is being brought upon us by CFCGK? Bro. Frank said: “We do not intend to do to them what they have been doing to us. For the sake of peace and eventual reconciliation, we do not intend to prevent them from using the name CFC of which we are now first in time, first in right, for as long as they strive to not let go of what it means to be truly CFC.”

Truly a manifestation of the humility of our Servant General, who the Vatican recognizes as founder of CFC, and in the ecclesiology of new movements, the charism resides in the founder. Where the founder is, there is the charism. Where the charism is, there is the authentic CFC.

Despite the persecution he has been subjected to for the past years, what he proposes is one big CFC family but with two distinct and separate branches, one for evangelization and another for social action. This is our definite position and we offer to them our hand in reconciliation.

Presidential Elections

The next aspect Bro. Frank wants to connect with us - is how we conduct ourselves in the face of a very divisive electoral contest going on in the US today. This is what he wrote:

“The teaching of the US bishops is very clear--a Catholic should not consider voting for a pro-abortion candidate. The mission of CFC-FFL is very clear--we are for family and life; our mission is to renew the family and defend life. It is very clear that one of the greatest evils in the world is abortion.

“No renewed Christian should show approval of abortion by voting for an evidently pro-abortion candidate, especially when there are pro-life candidates available. They would be taking the side of evil and would be against Christ himself.

“Please take steps to inform and educate our members, especially our young brethren, about life and the Church's clear stand, and how all these impact on the US elections.”

My rejoinder to this is also brief: Most of us should realize by now that CFCFFL is not about ourselves, it is all about Christ.

Our being CFCs are not subject to the Republican or Democratic platforms. We are beyond personalities, we are beyond politics. What is true is the other way around being Republicans or Democrats are subject to the Christian litmus test. Christ is our bottom-line. Our politics stop where Christ begins.

Thus our definition of life and pro-life does not therefore depend on politician's interpretation of our faith. The Catholic teachings on this issue are crystal clear life begins at the moment of conception and is sacred onto natural death.

This is biblical and is translated for all cultures in the New Catechism that says the sanctity of life also precedes choice considerations and is definitely the anti-thesis of abortion, or its more publicly acceptable form, abortion on demand.

Remember that this is where our first parents blew it. God is the tree of life. But our first parents chose the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and that is where the fall of mankind proceeded from.

Our being Catholics and Christians for that matter, is not just a matter of mere Church affiliation, but of professing the talk and walking the faith, as Christ puts it. Our Christian character builds or falls on everyday decisions that we make 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at home, at work or leisure, and anywhere in-between.

I can agree that we live in difficult times in this country today and that the economic as well as the security issues are very compelling. I can even agree that some candidates are charismatic and they reflect concerns that are close to our human hearts.

But brothers and sisters, with God there are no private moments, and decisions when we relate to Church teachings is not subject to processing whether it enhances our personal discoveries or not. God will not judge this country in terms of its wealth or power, or on the wealth or power of its people. God blesses America and history has proven that through the worst wars, the worst depressions that confronted this nation. But God gives this country an overflow of grace based only on the righteousness of its people and their humility before God.

I was watching EWTN last week and the homilist said what are we to do in a case we disagree with this very basic teaching? The priest said "change your mind."

And what if we cannot change our mind? Then if you cannot vote for God, do not vote, as to do so will be voting against God.

What concerns us today in the face of internal and external conflict is whether we are going to be a community in conflict or a community in agreement. I know some of us have strong opinions about these matters but it all redounds to who we are before God.

Bro. Frank sums it all up – "Our posture in CFC-FFL is never to burn our bridges, not to malign or attack our separated brethren, or those we have disagreements with, not to retaliate for wrongs done against us, and to pray for our detractors. We will seek not to deepen any rift, even as we speak the truth and long for peace with justice.

"Let us show all what it means to love, even our "enemies." Do not speak ill of

anyone, do not malign, do not judge, do not focus on personal rights, do not criticize anonymously, avoid scandal, do not promote hatred.

“Rejoice even in oppression and persecution if done for the sake of righteousness or because of our standing up for what is right in Christ. God allows crosses into our lives for our purification, and this is part of our way to holiness.”

This is urgent and crucial because it is our action in Christ, who has given us the power of binding and losing on earth whenever two or more are gathered in his name, that determines the key to the Father answering our prayer for ourselves, our families, our friends, our community and this country.

And so let us focus on our mission. Let us simply move on as we have done in the past year, so fruitfully everyone deserves congratulations and praise.

We are growing our two Maryland chapters to cover all counties from west to east, and populating Delaware to unit strength. Soon, Virginia will be an area, and North Carolina a chapter. We are embarking missions to South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

We are moving to have restoration assemblies in the Caribbean; we are returning to Cameroon and expanding our missions from Iloilo to the entirety of Western Visayas.

We are looking at a more exuberant Young Ministries and we are refreshing our ranks for the handmaids and the servants.

We are launching our own Work With the Poor. In connection with Habitat for Humanity we are on the drawing boards for a restoration village in Leyte with a land donation and a seed money of \$30,000 from a family in Baltimore. Soon we will also raise funds and grants for health and education of children below six. We have also been asked to host the livelihood opportunities in microfinance for the Cardinal Sin Village in Punta, Sta. Ana, Manila, a poor community abandoned by CFCGK.

We are developing more and better eResources not only for CFCUSA but the whole CFCFFL throughout the world. As we speak, HouseHoldLeader Newsletter subscribers have exceeded 20,000 in just a year, and our websites have posted hits from more than 60 countries.

Last but not least, we are hosting the 15th CFCUSA national conference this coming July 2009.

This is why we have to get to work and do rapid and massive evangelization. Assuming we are about 100 couples right now, if each just brought in one couple per year, even if we lose ten per cent at the end of every year, this would mean our numbers will swell not to five hundred in five years but more than 2,000. That is how God’s mathematics works.

Our commissioning is clear in Matthew 28: 19 and Acts 1:8 but because Jesus knew his public ministry will only last for three years before his sacrificial death and eventual ascension to heaven, this is what he said to his disciples in John 14:

(11) “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.

(12) Amen, amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater ones than these, because I am going to the Father.

Paul Little, in his book *Affirming the Will of God*, wrote: “The will of God is not like the magic package let down from heaven by a string. The will of God is far more like a scroll that unrolls everyday. The will of God is to be discerned and to be lived out everyday of our lives. It is not something to be grasped as a package once for all. Our call therefore, is basically not to follow a plan or a blueprint, or to go to a place or take up work, but rather to follow the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Thus our Lord ended our quote from John 14 with this note:

(13) And whatever you ask in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.

I repeat: This is not about us. Jesus is the miracle worker, we are but his servants. We are but his instruments for the greater honor and glory of God.

The harvest is indeed great, and God continues to call us to proclaim his Son to all Americans, as we indeed are families in the Holy Spirit renewing the face of the earth.

Thank you. God bless CFCFFL and God bless America.