

The Iglesia Filipina Independiente responds to the St. Martin's statement

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11. The Iglesia Filipina Independiente Responds to the St. Martin's Statement

Eleuterio J. Revollido, Iglesia Filipina Independiente

The Iglesia Filipina Independiente greatly appreciates the efforts exerted in formulating the St. Martin's Statement, promulgated in November 2006 at the conclusion of a theological consultation among three sister churches, the Episcopal Church of the USA, the Old Catholics of the Union of Utrecht, and the IFI. The clergy and lay people of our church acknowledge the gestures and concern evident in the document regarding the struggle of the Filipino people. This recognition is a fitting tribute to the sacrifices made by the martyrs of our church, exemplified in the Christ-like acts of Father William Tadena and Bishop Alberto Ramento, who gave their lives to defend the interest of poor peasants and workers against the onslaughts of economic globalization.

The Context

The theological consultation held in 2006 in the Netherlands explored the current context of poverty, oppression, and injustice in the Philippines. The extrajudicial killings, which intensified in 2005 and reached their peak from 2006 through the first quarter of 2007, took the lives of nearly eight hundred people; several hundred more disappeared. The strong pressure from other countries, churches, agencies, and organizations, especially the United Nations, slowed down the killing machine, which according to a UN report resulted from a flawed government anti-insurgency campaign and a defective judicial system. Many Filipinos, however, especially the political activists and church people who are true to their prophetic call, today still live with fear. Despite the witch-hunting scheme initiated by the governmental militarists, who lumped together as communists all those who were executed, who disappeared, and who are still under surveillance, the IFI believes that what they had in common was a strong opposition to the negative effects of globalization: its curse and its devastating effects on people's lives, culture, and environment.

The issue of corruption in the Philippines, the second highest in Asia, is becoming notorious with the entry of big new players like the giant Chinese companies. Such corruption implicates even those in the highest echelons of the Philippine government. The heightening competition and

conflict, not only among the agents of economic globalization but also among both those who propagate it and those who oppose its inhuman and unjust practices and effects, continue to divide the country. In the continuing struggle for money, lifestyle, and power on the one hand and, on the other, for sharing resources and equal opportunities, for assuring basic necessities such as food, shelter, health benefits, and education, and for achieving the freedom to express one's rights, the churches face an enormous challenge.

The propaganda effort carried out by multinational companies through their agents and client governments to win the hearts and minds of people, not for the sake of justice and equality but for sustained consumerist behavior, shows that the forces of evil prevail in spite of our combined efforts to defeat them. It also means that the Concordat churches and other ecumenical bodies should work together harder and more energetically, going beyond the effort to define our partnership with the goal of finding ways to provide concrete support for those who struggle for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

Our Reaffirmation of the Call for Transformation

The debate on the positive and negative effects of globalization continues. The St. Martin's Statement as a dynamic document should propel the faithful of our churches into a higher level of commitment as it paves the way for establishing the proper battleground. While the IFI recognizes with the signers of the Statement that all Christians are "participants in globalization," the IFI also considers it imperative to delineate the role of the authors and perpetrators of globalization and the response of the victims.

The present state of world affairs, which creates a global village subscribing to the agenda of consumerist and exploitative economic globalization, needs redirection. Its individualistic values lead to fragmentation, divisiveness, dominance, and superiority. As Concordat churches, we also need to redirect our energies from our traditional work of enriching our own church traditions to engaging in the transformation of structures of the larger community of people threatened by dehumanizing forces. We must redirect the focus of the Christian community from the gifts and fruits of our ambition to the gift giver himself, to him who is the source of all the fruits we enjoy.

The IFI also appreciates the attempt to suggest relevant approaches in using the three traditional ways of being the church: *leitourgia*, *diakonia*,

and *martyria*. Regarding *diakonia*, a lay member of the IFI has suggested that our sister churches in the affluent countries should endeavor not only to comfort the afflicted, as when partner churches showed their concern after the IFI lost Fr. Narciso Pico, Fr. William Tadena, and Bishop Alberto Ramento at the hands of the murderers and henchmen of economic globalization, but also to afflict the comfortable in their own countries, those who enjoy luxurious lives at the expense of the exploited people of the third world.

In the area of *martyria*, the IFI Supreme Council of Bishops (SCB) in its statement of October 12, 2006, affirmed the clear example given to the Christian churches by Bishop Ramento: "We pray to God that the death of Alberto, our brother bishop, a martyr for peace, will not be in vain but give courage to the people to continue the struggle for justice and peace in the world." But this affirmation of his martyrdom falls short of the suggestion given in the St. Martin's Statement "of the possibility of Bishop Ramento's canonization according to the norms and ideals of each of the sister churches."

Although in 1903 the IFI, through the SCB, declared as saints the nationalist priests Mariano Gomez, Jose Burgos, and Jacinto Zamora, as well as the national hero Dr. Jose Rizal, no document is available to shed light on the process they took. Present IFI documents contain no reference to the idea of canonization, and no effort has been made to popularize or even to give religious reverence to those four who were named saints of the church. Even worse is the fact that the IFI's action regarding these four men was totally forgotten after the 1948 agreement in which the Episcopal Church in the USA granted apostolic succession to the IFI. In that agreement the early documents of the IFI, specifically the Six Fundamental Epistles and the 1903 Doctrines and Constitutional Rules, were declared "not to be held as binding either upon the clergy and laity of this church in matters of Doctrine, Discipline or Order, wherein they differ in substance from the Declaration of Faith and Articles of Religion" (1947 Constitution and Canons). This statement has created a dilemma for the present members of the SCB. The suggestion of the St. Martin's Statement that the churches work for canonization of Bishop Ramento could be of great help to the IFI and to the Concordat churches as well, as each church will be educated by the opinions and suggestions coming from the others about the process to be followed.

Our Catholicity as an Instrument of Transformation

The essence of our catholicity is our common belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. This universality in faith presumes our oneness as Concordat churches, for it is in this common belief that we become one community of believers, even though separated by space and time. This community has a parallel in the concept of a global village, which is not new to Christianity. In fact, it has been at the heart of the Christian message from time immemorial, in the search to bring people together. This basic task of ministry was seen in Jesus himself through his work of building community in order to create interdependence, mutuality, interconnectedness, and reciprocity among people and nations. It has an aspect of *koinonia*, binding people to participate in God's transformation of the world so that creation may be emancipated from the bondage of slavery.

The essence of economic globalization propagated by multinational companies and affluent countries is the search for profit, consumption, influence, and power. Globalization too proclaims that it brings people together, but it approaches this goal through a different set of values. It encourages individualism rather than community, competition rather cooperation, and consumerism rather than sustainability – values that lead to fragmentation, divisiveness, dominance, and superiority.

Our catholicity, then, is an instrument for the transformation of the global village, which is today influenced by the inexorable international movement toward globalization. Through our common belief, our “recognition and respect for all human beings as children of God,” and our commitment to “subscribing to the faith handed over by the apostles,” our catholicity can defeat the dehumanizing effects of economic globalization.

We are not starting from scratch. As Concordat churches, we have already stated our commitment to fight the dehumanizing effects of economic globalization, at the historic International Church Leaders Solidarity Summit, held during the IFI centenary celebration in 2002. This meeting produced “Communique: The Manila Covenant,” whose primary concern was the “disruptive consequences of economic globalization.”

Our Recommendations

As a way forward in this important endeavor, the IFI recommends that the Concordat churches

1. Set up concrete programs and projects for peace, justice, and the integrity of creation in each church as well as creating an international network to carry out these programs.
Example: – The IFI Peacemakers (Peace and Justice Issue)
 – The Bishop Aglipay Mission (BAM) Peasant and Workers Concern
2. Support one another's theological education programs to ensure that the future leaders of the churches, whether lay or ordained, be educated about and conscious of the fight of the Concordat churches against the deleterious effects of economic globalization. The affluent churches should directly support the growth of good theological education while also helping to create the needed structures for reciprocal sharing of curriculum and personnel.
3. Immerse church leaders (preferably from two or more churches at the same time) in the cultures of the affluent and poor countries to enable them to understand and take concrete action on the causes and effects of economic globalization.
4. Encourage the immersion of seminarians in poorer areas in their own societies and in other poorer countries in order that by being with the people they may come to see that relevant theology comes from committing oneself to people's struggle for life in all its fullness. The first act is one of commitment to serve the people; the second is the reflection or writing of a liberating theology that comes from experience.
5. Call for a theological forum on the issues of martyrdom and sainthood.
6. Call for an ecumenical forum on church and state relations.

While the St. Martin's Statement refers to globalization as being a blessing as well as a curse to the people of the world, the IFI, in part because of its particular geographical and social exposure to the dangers of globalization, calls for increasing attention to the ways in which globalization is worsening the already dire situation of poor men, women, and children and undermining rather than building the global village envisioned by the church. The IFI thus calls the churches to unite and, in accord with the teaching of the prophets of old, "to do what is just, to show constant love, and to live in humble fellowship with our God" (Micah 6:8).