



Lecture A: *Dialogue of life between chaplains, soldiers and their families (Asian Perspective)* -

Rev Fr. Felix Ferrer STHD, SVD

12 September 2011

Manansala B Hall, Sulo Riviera Hotel

Quezon City, Philippines

Lecture Highlights

Rev Fr Felix Ferrer's lecture touched on the concept of the Dialogue of Life and its general application. He began by mentioning the acronym **DIALOGUE of LIFE** - which should mean **Delve Into A Lot Of Great Unity Efforts or Feel Lost in Fearful End!** He situated the Dialogue of Life in the Asian context which, in demographic terms contains 2/3 of the world's population and home to various cultures. Providing an operational definition, Father Ferrer broke the Dialogue of Life into the following main points:

- 1) Dialogue is a manner of acting, an attitude, a spirit which guides one's conduct.
- 2) Every Christian is called to live dialogue, whether as part of majority or minority.
- 3) Every Christian ought to bring the gospel in any environment he lives and works in.

Father Ferrer emphasized that dialogue must address the following considerations: peaceful coexistence; direct challenge to people, the need for individuals and communities to accept one another regardless of differences in faith; the present challenge to adherents of living faiths to rise up and be witnesses to what they believe; and the imperative of working together for social justice, welfare and human rights which is a particular focus of Asian Bishops.

The rationale or the "why" for the Dialogue of Life is for Christians to reflect on how they can become witnesses to their communities by addressing the intellectual, moral and spiritual challenges it brings. On the intellectual aspect, this means addressing religious pluralism. On the moral aspect, the challenge is to fulfill the world's strong desire for peace and cohesion. The theological challenge is the reduction of exclusivist religious tendencies.

The how of the Dialogue of Life was best described by Father Ferrer through the various initiatives in the region to address specific challenges such as: inter-religious efforts to support workers rights in Korea; shelters for battered women in Thailand; post conflict reconciliation in Gunarat, India; defending the civil status of Hill Tribe in Thailand; defending squatters in Philippines; and publicizing cases of Christians persecuted in Pakistan.

In conclusion, father Ferrer gave meaning on the acronym DIALOGUE OF LIFE by associating its component parts with corresponding meanings:

- Delve Into – Involvement
- A Lot of – Quantity
- Great Unity Efforts – Quality
- Or Feel Lost – Consequence
- In Fearful End – Finality

Open Forum

The ensuing open forum generated questions on the emphasis on the squatter issue rather than on the security challenges, on extending the interfaith dialogue initiatives from the Philippines to other parts of Asia, challenges and key success factors of dialogue and the dilemma for soldiers in adhering to Christian principles when their adversaries do not adhere to the same.

Father Ferrer clarified that the squatter issue is one example of dialogue advocacy without meaning to give it undue attention. On the interfaith initiative, in the late 1990s, there was an interfaith dialogue in the Philippines between denominational and non-denominational Christians which sparked similar activities in other parts of Asia. A key success factor of the dialogue of life is the creation of interfaith councils nationwide (IFCN) which have registered notable successes in promoting dialogue in conflict areas in Mindanao. Challenges to building a climate of peace, however, remain.

On the dilemma of soldiers fighting opponents with a different mindset and set of ethics, Father Ferrer admitted that his perspective as a theologian is limited. From a moral perspective, he found there is a problem with the need to kill if only to bring about peace, although it is all too real. He also stressed that the Rules of Engagement are critical to bind and account for the actions of soldiers.

A common comment generated among the delegates was the need for a very strong political will on both sides of the divide and isolation of the fundamentalists in relation to the dialogue of life.