

ENGLISH TRANSLATION OF EDWIL ZABALA'S INTERVIEW

For the benefit of our viewers, why did you decide to organize this rally?

To restore peace in the country, and we return to what our president himself said to prioritize that because if we allow other issues to prevail there, none of the Filipino people will benefit.

We are citizens too, just like you so we feel what many feel especially those who are poor who need the attention of the officials we elected. Let's go back to peace and unity and focus on the issues at hand.

Just so it is clear this rally was lodged because of the impeachment complaint against vice president Sarah Duterte, this rally of peace, was lodged due to the opinion of our president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. when he said, and I will paraphrase what he said, "this will not benefit even a single Filipino." so that is our call. Let's do what benefits every Filipino.

Brother Edwell, some statements made during the rally were very harsh such as there has to be on selflessness, who are being referred to as selfish by the Iglesia Cristo in those statements?

Am, No one was mentioned so I will not mention anyone. Whoever believes it was them, well let us all go back to forgiving one another, to unity, compassion to one another because there is a large context and a heavier problem that needs the attention of our elected officials. Now, if someone feels that he was mentioned as we heard earlier, stated by the Bible, let us forgive one another.

According to some analysts, this is a and I quote, "a show of force for vice president Sarah Duterte" during this time of misunderstanding between her and president Marcos. What can you say about this perspective from political analysts?

I believe that if those who said that heard what we conveyed during the rally, they will see that that is not the intention.. That is not the objective of the church of Christ, the intention of the church while may be forgotten by some, due to so much noise, we have to unite, have peace, because if we do not unite, and there is no peace, the problems we have now will not have solutions, they will be prolonged, worsen, so it is much needed to solve these severe problems.

Is this the first time the church has done this?

Umm, no, it is not. Because in some occasions in the past, if need be, the church of Christ has spoken for the sake of our fellow citizens.

It was stated over and over that it was not a political rally, as mentioned by church members, and those who spoke that you are not hoping to influence political decisions so how do you distinguished that?

It's not in support of this or that candidate, or this or that political party, this is basically in support of what the president himself said when he was interviewed, no one was asking whether what he was saying was a political statement, people took what he said at face value, we're hoping that in echoing what he himself said people will also accept it at face value. He said if I remember correctly, he was describing it as a storm in a teacup is that what he said? What does that mean? It's such a little thing. It doesn't have to be blown up beyond what it is. It's nothing really. We're hoping to call on everyone, it was nothing after all so let us be at peace, let us give them a chance to perform the ultimate job mandated to elected officials. We are not naming names, good, or bad, never, no, what we are saying is that we are in one country. If we do not unite, we do not have peace. We cannot say that there is another Philippines and half of us move there, no, this is it. Let us unite and whether people are going to say that's a political statement or not, it's a question of perspective, perhaps or opinion. But for us, it is not political. It's very practical, let us be forgiving, let us unite, let us have peace, it takes work, but if we are willing to go back to those basic principles of decency in our relationship with each other, peace, hopefully things are going to get better.

Have you spoken to vice president Sara Duterte or have other English Cristo officials has she sent a message that you could have used at the rally

Personally, no. I don't know if they have and that's the truth. In all honesty, I have no knowledge of it because I am preoccupied with other things. I'm sorry.

Sir, the stance of the Iglesia ni Cristo has been very clear. Is it fair to say that the politicians particularly candidates in the 2025 elections that would not heed the call for unity and pursue impeachment would face repercussions and not enjoy the support of the Iglesia Cristo?

I really cannot guess how the members or the leaders of the Iglesia ni Cristo deal with someone or anyone who would feel that way or do what you just described.

Let's just leave it at this, the Iglesia ni Cristo called for peace, even if we sound like a broken record to you. We are calling for peace because that is what we hear even from non-members so if those who really heed the voice of our fellow citizens, hopefully they give importance to that, that it may be possible we get along, maybe we can unite, maybe we can have peace . There is no point of contention really just because of this or that issue we will fight. Hopefully, if there is no solution, it will just be between two or three individuals to sort it out. Not the whole Philippines.

how about the presence of the politicians here take us through it did you invite them? Did they present themselves? Do you hear what is the insinuation of their presence here?

Well for one thing we said this was open to the public. They're still part of the public, we did not invite specific people, persons, politicians, groups. no, we just said this is open to everyone who believes what we are going to be saying to the public, which is let's unite again, let's have peace.

Sir, just to clarify is there anyone endorsed by the English Cristo for the midterm elections?

No, we don't have that. And maybe it's good for us to address that. The Iglesia ni Cristo has never endorsed anyone. When we unite to vote, we talk amongst ourselves. We don't really involve those outside the Iglesia ni so it doesn't really affect anyone. We are the only ones who discuss that.

Brother Edwil, in relation to this impeachment, wraps the investigation into the corruption and misuse of public funds, is it included in the call of the church of Christ for peace to investigate these issues?

If you noticed that one of the speakers earlier, who is also a lawyer basically and to paraphrase what he said "in order to have peace, there is a need to uphold the law". If there is no law, there is no peace or if there is a law, but not being enacted upon, there is no order. So as we heard earlier at the stage, we abide by what the law states, why not but if the law is not enforced, we hope that those who can understand, step back because maybe we do not notice that we are already breaking the law.

Brother Edwil, if this is truly a generic call for peace, why mention, vice president Sarah Duterte in this rally?

Because the starting point is what the president said that's where it started and so we must put that into the context of the discussion.

Is it not possible to just pray for peace, period? Without the political context?

Well, again, no no not again. Yes. We do pray for peace every time we congregate that's part of the prayer of the Iglesia ni Cristo. this time around, we felt that it was needed to call the attention of people. I said again earlier, I understand why some people think that is political but it's not as far as we're concerned it's not. It's something moral actually, it's something that all of us are morally bound to uphold. Let's have peace. Let us have unity.

There are critics that say if this is a moral exercise, the church of Christ is supporting who is accused of stealing money from the people, the investigation is still ongoing, of course, but

some people are still questioning why you use your religion to support morally questionable characters like the vice president?

Those are assumptions they are doing and not just an assumption if you say it out loud. You should provide proof for that until there is no proof we should remain neutral. Let us wait for the result. If you noticed the last verse earlier from the Bible for those who did not see it and you're watching it in this interview, our Lord Jesus Christ I need to go back to him because you're talking to us, and we are a religion. The Lord Jesus Christ faced a case where in someone was caught in the act of singing, but in the end, what did he say, I am not judging you, but send no more. That's someone who has caught in the act of sinning. If not, we have to all the more be careful. We are not to cast the first stone while nothing is proven. So we are not using the term morally questionable or what other object adjectives are used. It's difficult because our Lord Jesus Christ to himself did not. Who are we to oppose what he said. We cannot do that.

Brother Edwil, and the two out of three impeachment complaints some catholic priests were involved in the filing and some of the grounds that they cited were also moral grounds. You said it is imperative to file this complaint. How do you view this perspective?

I suppose they should be the ones explaining why they did what they did or why they said what they said. I wouldn't try to explain their position for them right?

But from your point of view, what is moral about this issue?

Well, we have to go back to what the Bible says. If you listen to what we were reading from the Bible earlier, unity is good in the eyes of God. That would be moral. If there is no unity, according to our Lord Jesus Christ himself the kingdom which has division crumbles apart. So imagine Christ himself said so, if we apply that to our country, if we allow division due to this unity, what are the adjectives or synonyms of division? It's our destruction if people watching this interview say I believe in Christ I believe in what the Bible says then there's no reason for any of us to doubt what Christ said. That if one kingdom is not united and I'm bracing what the Bible says, if there is no unity, it will be divided, it will be destroyed. That's gospel, right?

One last question speaking of unity some are saying, the participants of the rally were brought there. They had to be there. how would you address those claims?

Well, what do they mean by the word “brought”there? there are many definitions of the word. Our breath went here how they got here whether they used their own car or they carpooled or rented a car. The issue is not how they got there. It is why they came. That’s the most important, why our brother came. There was only one call, the call is timely to remind everyone that unity is important, peace is important. There are more serious problems. Our country is facing, and they will not be solved without unity and peace. They cannot be faced, and that is still based on what our president said. If this pushes through, what did he say, it’s going to take up the time of the house, the Senate and different agencies of the government for what? He said, it’s not going to benefit even a single Filipino. That’s him already. He’s the chief executive. He must know something that we don’t when he said those words.

I think brother Edwil, what they are saying about your brother being brought to the rally is that they are not thinking they are just blindly obeying the leaders. How do you address that perception about the members?

Well, if you notice earlier, it was explained to the attendees what we stand for. We always do this. The church clarifies to the members why something is done before hand. Unity, peace, and the members of the church of Christ know that. No one is telling them that if you don’t go, this will happen or that nothing like that. Otherwise, those who lost sleep in this or those who got hungry if ever or thirsty, or got rained on, they must’ve gone home already you saw no one checking attendance if you came you stayed many even outside, so if that’s the definition of the word “brought” there I doubt very much if the crowd outside would agree that they were coerced to be there.