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*October 11, 2000*

*Dear Don,*

*On to some more important news. Right now I am in Davao, because the situation is pretty tense in Columbio. I was advised to stay away, and rather than sit around doing nothing in Kidapawan, I would rather sit around and do nothing in Davao.*

*Here's what's been happening. We received information that Peter Geremia was targeted for kidnapping by a Muslim group. Two weeks ago, as he was returning to Kidapawan from Columbio, there was a suspicious motorcycle following and "pacing" the truck on which he was a passenger. However, he was in the middle of the front seat, and the truck was filled with many people; for whatever reason, he was able to proceed safely. The following week, Peter heeded the advice of his friends and did not come to Columbio. (You know that the usual, predictable practice is for him to come every Saturday and return to Kidapawan on Sunday). Later, we learned that two groups of armed men (Muslims, and strangers to the area) were waiting for him all day on Saturday. Finally, in the late afternoon, they were confronted by the officials of the area (also Muslim) and told to leave.*

*Then on Sunday, not yet knowing what had taken place on Saturday, I passed thru the same area on my way to Kidapawan, because there was a clergy meeting on Monday. Whether by luck or Providence, I didn't meet with any difficulty. My plan was to return to Columbio on Tuesday, but on Monday afternoon my secretary called by radio and told me not to return; rather I should wait in Kidapawan and someone from Columbio would come and talk to me. She did not want to give any details over the open radio. So on Tuesday the secretary herself came to Kidapawan with a letter for me, from the parish council President. He said that he had been visited by a Muslim contact, who delivered a message from the Chief of Police in Columbio, informing me that the kidnap threat toward Peter and me was real, and that it was not safe to pass through the area (Paglas) leading to Columbio. Thus, I should not return to Columbio for a while. And that's where the situation is up to now.*

*Tomorrow (Saturday), I will call Kidapawan and see if anything has changed. Then we will decide when I will return to Kidapawan and, hopefully, to Columbio. The analysis of all this has taken several directions. Peter is pretty convinced that, while the threat comes from a group of Muslims, the "backers" might be local (Christian) politicians, trying to silence the church's criticism of the "all-out war" policy. In fact, our bishop has been very vocal on this issue, and almost a lone voice in doing so. So, the speculation is that someone might take advantage of the general confusion of the area, making sure that any incident occurred in a Muslim area, so that the MILF would be blamed and there would be one more reason to pursue an all-out war policy.*

*There's even some speculation that Manero supporters are taking the opportunity to seek revenge on Peter, who was of course instrumental in both his original conviction for the Favali murder and in the more recent revocation of his parole, sending him back to jail. On the other hand, some of my people in Columbio speculate that this is connected with the upcoming mayoral elections in Columbio. That is, different factions might be trying to destabilize the area in order to campaign on the premise that they would be the ones to provide order. If this is true, it is pretty disturbing, because the mayoral elections are not until next May! That would mean 7 or 8 months of problems.*

*Almost all of the information we've received indicates that Peter is the target. I would be something like "Plan B", if Peter is not available. I do plan to remain prudent, even if it takes a form I'm not so happy with. I don't mind staying away for a short while, in an emergency situation. But if this stretches into weeks or months, I will be very disheartened not to be with my people.*

*So, please pray for all of us here. Pray for a real and lasting peace, and pray that I will soon be able to return to where I belong: among the people of Columbio.*

*Take care,*



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