



Republic of the Philippines  
**Supreme Court**  
Manila

*EN BANC*

**MONETTE MANAUIS-TAGGUEG,**  
Complainant,

**A.C. No. 13674**  
[Formerly CBD Case No.  
**16-5221]**

Present:

GESMUNDO, *C.J.*,  
LEONEN,  
CAGUIOA,  
HERNANDO,  
LAZARO-JAVIER,\*  
INTING,  
ZALAMEDA,  
LOPEZ, M.,  
GAERLAN,  
ROSARIO,  
LOPEZ, J.,  
DIMAAMPAO,  
MARQUEZ,  
KHO, JR., and  
SINGH, *JJ.*

- versus -

**ATTY. VINCENZO NONATO M.**  
**TAGGUEG,**

Respondent.

Promulgated:

August 1, 2023

x

x

**DECISION**

***PER CURIAM:***

Once again, the Court is confronted with a charge of gross immorality leveled against a lawyer for turning his back on his legitimate wife and family in order to cohabit with another woman.

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\* On Official Business.

Before the Court is an administrative complaint<sup>1</sup> for disbarment filed by Monette Manauis-Taggug with the Integrated Bar of the Philippines – Commission on Bar Discipline (IBP-CBD) against her husband Atty. Vincenzo Nonato M. Taggug.

The precursor facts are synthesized as follows:

On June 6, 2002, complainant Monette Manauis-Taggug and respondent Atty. Vincenzo Nonato M. Taggug got married in Quezon City.<sup>2</sup> Thereafter, their union bore a child named Vincent Nayyef M. Taggug.<sup>3</sup>

On December 13, 2016, complainant filed a Complaint-Affidavit<sup>4</sup> with the IBP-CBD, seeking the disbarment of respondent for abandoning his legitimate family and cohabiting with a woman named Cindy Villajuan, whom respondent purportedly married despite the subsistence of his marriage with complainant.

To bolster her imputations, complainant narrated that sometime in March 2015, she went to the law office of respondent to talk to him regarding their personal issues. Upon seeing her, however, respondent got mad, went home to their residence to pack his things, and left without any explanation. Complainant texted respondent the following day, and the latter replied that he is no longer returning to her because he cannot tolerate her attitude. Subsequently, complainants' parents tried to intervene and talk to respondent, but the latter shut down any hope of reconciliation with complainant.<sup>5</sup>

A few months thereafter, complainant sought the help of her friend at the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) to determine the whereabouts of respondent. The investigation revealed that respondent is now living in San Jose Del Monte, Bulacan, and is cohabiting with his mistress, Cindy Villajuan. This impelled complainant to search for Cindy Villajuan's social media account, where complainant discovered that she now bore the last name of complainant's husband, *i.e.*, "Taggug." Complainant also saw pictures of Cindy and respondent's wedding, together with other photos of their amorous relationship, posted on said account. Complainant then went to the alleged wedding venue of respondent and Cindy, and the owner thereof purportedly confirmed their wedding ceremony held on February 20, 2015.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Rollo*, pp. 1-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Id.* at 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at 1-3.

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at 1.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

Acting on the complaint, the IBP-CBD issued an Order<sup>7</sup> dated May 22, 2017, directing respondent to file his duly verified answer. Respondent, however, turned a deaf ear to such directive.

In a Notice of Mandatory Conference,<sup>8</sup> the IBP-CBD directed both parties to appear before it on October 23, 2017, with a warning that non-appearance shall be deemed a waiver of their right to participate in further proceedings. Both parties were likewise required to submit their respective mandatory conference briefs at least three days prior to the mandatory conference.

On the scheduled mandatory conference on October 23, 2017, complainant appeared and submitted her Pre-Trial Brief.<sup>9</sup> She likewise submitted the following as supporting evidence: a) Certificate of Marriage between her and respondent;<sup>10</sup> b) Certificate of Live Birth of their son Vincent Nayyef M. Taggug;<sup>11</sup> c) print-out of pictures from the Facebook account of Cindy;<sup>12</sup> d) Reservation Slip for respondent and Cindy's wedding ceremony on February 20, 2015;<sup>13</sup> and e) Customer Inquiry Form stating the details of respondent and Cindy's wedding.<sup>14</sup>

Respondent, on the other hand, failed to comply with both directives to appear before the IBP-CBD at the scheduled mandatory conference and submit a mandatory conference brief.<sup>15</sup>

Thereupon, the IBP-CBD issued its Report and Recommendation<sup>16</sup> on August 3, 2020, recommending the disbarment of respondent for Gross Immorality under Section 27, Rule 138 of the Rules of Court,<sup>17</sup> and Canon 1, Rule 1.01<sup>18</sup> and Canon 7, Rule 7.03<sup>19</sup> of the Code of Professional

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<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at 9.

<sup>9</sup> *Id.* at 11-12.

<sup>10</sup> *Id.* at 13.

<sup>11</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.* at 15-34.

<sup>13</sup> *Id.* at 35.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* at 36.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* at 10; See IBP-CBD Order dated October 23, 2017 issued by IBP-CBD Commissioner Rico A. Limpingo.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* at 45-49. The Report and Recommendation was signed by IBP-CBD Commissioner Victor Emmanuel M. Pangilinan.

<sup>17</sup> **Section 27. Attorneys removed or suspended by Supreme Court on what grounds.** — A member of the bar may be removed or suspended from his office as attorney by the Supreme Court for any deceit, malpractice, or other gross misconduct in such office, grossly immoral conduct, or by reason of his conviction of a crime involving moral turpitude, or for any violation of the oath which he is required to take before the admission to practice, or for a wilfull disobedience of any lawful order of a superior court, or for corruptly or wilful appearing as an attorney for a party to a case without authority so to do. The practice of soliciting cases at law for the purpose of gain, either personally or through paid agents or brokers, constitutes malpractice.

<sup>18</sup> Rule 1.01. A lawyer shall not engage in unlawful, dishonest, immoral, or deceitful conduct.

<sup>19</sup> Rule 7.03 - A lawyer shall not engage in conduct that adversely reflects on his fitness to practice law, nor shall he, whether in public or private life, behave in a scandalous manner to the discredit of the legal profession.

Responsibility for abandoning his legitimate family, contracting a bigamous marriage with another woman, and flagrantly displaying such illicit relationship. The IBP-CBD likewise noted respondent's previous suspension for three months in the Resolution issued by this Court on July 17, 2019 in a case entitled, "*Roberto J. Delloro v. Atty. Vincenzo Nonato M. Taggug*," and docketed as A.C. No. 12422.<sup>20</sup>

In the Resolution dated June 25, 2022,<sup>21</sup> the IBP Board of Governors modified the Investigating Commissioner's recommendation, lowering the penalty to an indefinite suspension from the practice of law, and further imposing a fine in the amount of ₱20,000.00 for disobeying the lawful orders of the IBP-CBD, thus—

*RESOLVED, to MODIFY, as it is hereby MODIFIED, the Report and Recommendation of the Investigating Commissioner (IC) in the instant case, and to recommend instead the imposition upon Respondent Atty. Vincenzo Nonato M. Taggug (of) the penalty of INDEFINITE SUSPENSION from the practice of law; and*

*RESOLVED FURTHER, to recommend that the Respondent be meted out a FINE of Php5,000.00 each for disobeying the directives of the IC, i.e., i) for failure to file an answer to the complaint, ii) failure to file a mandatory conference brief, iii) failure to attend the mandatory conference, and iv) failure to file his position paper, or a total of Twenty Thousand Pesos (Php20,000.00).<sup>22</sup>*

Perceivably, the pivotal issue for the Court's resolution is whether or not the respondent should be held administratively liable for Gross Immorality.

### THE COURT'S RULING

*The Court adopts the IBP Board of Governors' findings, albeit with modification as to the imposable penalty.*

The Code of Professional Responsibility mandates all lawyers to possess good moral character at the time of their application for admission to the Bar, and requires them to maintain such character until their retirement from the practice of law.<sup>23</sup>

Complainant asseverates that respondent violated the following provisions of the Code of Professional Responsibility:

<sup>20</sup> *Rollo*, p. 49.

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* at 43-44, see *Notice of Resolution* signed by IBP National Secretary Doroteo Lorenzo B. Aguila.

<sup>22</sup> *Id.* at 43.

<sup>23</sup> See *Advincula v. Advincula*, 787 Phil. 101, 111-112 (2016) [Per J. Bersamin, En Banc].

## CANON 1

Rule 1.01 — A lawyer shall not engage in unlawful, dishonest, immoral or deceitful conduct.

## CANON 7

Rule 7.03 — A lawyer shall not engage in conduct that adversely reflects on his fitness to practice law, nor shall he, whether in public or private life, behave in a scandalous manner to the discredit of the legal profession.

The new Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability (CPRA),<sup>24</sup> which was approved on April 11, 2023 and made applicable to pending cases,<sup>25</sup> repealed<sup>26</sup> the foregoing provisions and incorporated these Canons:

## CANON II

## PROPRIETY

A lawyer shall, at all times, act with propriety and maintain the appearance of propriety in personal and professional dealings, observe honesty, respect and courtesy, and uphold the dignity of the legal profession consistent with the highest standards of ethical behavior.

**SECTION 1. *Proper conduct.*** — A lawyer shall not engage in unlawful, dishonest, immoral or deceitful conduct.

**SECTION 2. *Dignified conduct.*** — . . .

A lawyer shall not engage in conduct that adversely reflects on one's fitness to practice law, nor behave in a scandalous manner, whether in public or private life, to the discredit of the legal profession.

## CANON VI

## ACCOUNTABILITY

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<sup>24</sup> A.M. No. 22-09-01-SC.

<sup>25</sup> **GENERAL PROVISIONS**

**SECTION 1. *Transitory Provision.*** — The CPRA shall be applied to all pending and future cases, except to the extent that in the opinion of the Supreme Court, its retroactive application would not be feasible or would work injustice, in which case the procedure under which the cases were filed shall govern.

<sup>26</sup> **SECTION 2. *Repealing Clause.*** — The Code of Professional Responsibility of 1988, Sections 20 to 37 of Rule 138 and Rule 139-B of the Rules of Court are repealed.

The Lawyer's Oath, as found in Rule 138 of the Rules of Court is amended and superseded. Any resolution, circular, bar matter, or administrative order issued by or principles established in the decisions of the Supreme Court inconsistent with the CPRA are deemed modified or repealed.

By taking the Lawyer's Oath, a lawyer becomes a guardian of the law and an administrator of justice. As such, the lawyer shall observe the highest degree of morality, adhere to rigid standards of mental fitness, and faithfully comply with the rules of the legal profession.

Failure to honor this covenant makes the lawyer unfit to continue in the practice of law and accountable to society, the courts, the legal profession, and the client.

In *Villarente v. Atty. Villarente*,<sup>27</sup> the Court elucidated:

It is expected that every lawyer, being an officer of the Court, must not only be in fact of good moral character but must also be seen to be of good moral character and leading lives in accordance with the highest moral standards of the community. Specifically, a member of the Bar and officer of the Court is required not only to refrain from adulterous relationships or keeping mistresses, but also to conduct himself in such a way as to avoid scandalizing the public by creating the belief that he is flouting those moral standards. If the practice of law is to remain an honorable profession and attain its basic ideals, whoever is a member of its ranks should not only master its tenets and principles, but must also, in their lives, accord continuing fidelity to them. The requirement of good moral character is of much greater import, as far as the general public is concerned, than the possession of legal learning.<sup>28</sup>

Along this grain, the pronouncement of the Court in *Perez v. Atty. Catindig*<sup>29</sup> as to what constitutes grossly immoral conduct as a ground for disbarment is quite illuminating, to wit:

A lawyer may be suspended or disbarred for any misconduct showing any fault or deficiency in his moral character, honesty, probity or good demeanor. Immoral conduct involves acts that are willful, flagrant, or shameless, and that show a moral indifference to the opinion of the upright and respectable members of the community. Immoral conduct is gross when it is so corrupt as to constitute a criminal act, or so unprincipled as to be reprehensible to a high degree, or when committed under such scandalous or revolting circumstances as to shock the community's sense of decency. The Court makes these distinctions, as the supreme penalty of disbarment arising from conduct requires grossly immoral, not simply immoral, conduct.<sup>30</sup>

In the case at bench, the evidence adduced by complainant indeed establish a pattern of conduct that is grossly immoral – one which is not only corrupt or unprincipled, but reprehensible to a high degree. Complainant and respondent contracted marriage on June 6, 2002,<sup>31</sup> and their union eventually

<sup>27</sup> 884 Phil. 1 (2020) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

<sup>28</sup> *Id.* at 9.

<sup>29</sup> 755 Phil. 297 (2015) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at 307-308.

<sup>31</sup> *Rollo*, p. 13.

bore a child.<sup>32</sup> As it happened, respondent subsequently abandoned his family, cohabited with another woman, and even flaunted his illicit relationship to the public.<sup>33</sup> True it is that the photos<sup>34</sup> and Reservation Slip<sup>35</sup> of the alleged wedding ceremony presented by complainant fall short of the required evidence to prove that respondent indeed entered into a bigamous marriage with Cindy. However, it is equally true that respondent exhibited a highly reproachable conduct by engaging in an extramarital affair with a woman and therewithal, flaunting their illicit relationship to the public. The foregoing circumstances seriously taint respondent's sense of social propriety and moral values and constitutes a blatant and purposeful disregard of our laws on marriage.

Jurisprudence abounds with iterations that a married lawyer's abandonment of his spouse in order to live and cohabit with another constitutes gross immorality. The offense may even be criminal, amounting to concubinage or adultery.<sup>36</sup> The Court has consistently lent zero tolerance to lawyers who openly engaged in illicit affairs during the subsistence of their marriages. In *Ceniza v. Atty. Ceniza*,<sup>37</sup> *Bustamante-Alejandro v. Atty. Alejandro*,<sup>38</sup> *Panagsagan v. Atty. Panagsagan*,<sup>39</sup> and *Villarente v. Atty. Villarente*,<sup>40</sup> this Court imposed the supreme penalty of disbarment on the erring lawyers for being guilty of committing grossly immoral conduct in abandoning the legal spouse in order to cohabit with another woman.

Here, respondent's transgression is even worse as he flaunted his illicit relationship with his mistress on social media, thereby manifesting his insouciance towards the harsh effects of his immorality on his wife and their child. Plain as day, respondent did not live up to the stringent standards required of him by the law profession.

It cannot be stressed enough that respondent failed to debunk the evidence adduced by complainant showing his extramarital affair with Cindy. Quite tellingly, rather than controverting complainant's averments, respondent neither appeared before the IBP to submit his answer nor present any counter evidence, leaving complainants' allegations undisputed.

It bears accentuating that every lawyer is expected to be honorable and reliable at all times. This must be so, because any lawyer who cannot abide by the laws in his private life cannot be expected to do so in his professional

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<sup>32</sup> *Id.* at 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* at 15-34.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* at 15-17.

<sup>35</sup> *Id.* at 35.

<sup>36</sup> *Villarente v. Atty. Villarente*, *supra* note 27 at 11.

<sup>37</sup> 851 Phil. 372 (2019) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

<sup>38</sup> 467 Phil. 139 (2004) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

<sup>39</sup> 864 Phil. 19 (2019) [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

<sup>40</sup> *Supra* note 27.

dealings.<sup>41</sup> By his scandalous and highly immoral conduct, therefore, the respondent committed grossly immoral conduct, and violated the fundamental canons of ethics expected to be obeyed by the members of the legal profession. Ineluctably, the Court imposes the penalty of disbarment upon respondent,<sup>42</sup> consistent with the provisions of Section 33, in relation to Section 37, Canon VI of the CPRA, *viz.*:

**SECTION 33. *Serious offenses.* – Serious offenses include:**

....

- (f) Grossly immoral conduct, or an act that is so corrupt or false as to constitute a criminal act, or so immoral as to be reprehensible to a high degree;

....

**SECTION 37. *Sanctions.*—**

- (a) If the respondent is found guilty of a serious offense, any of the following sanctions, or a combination thereof, shall be imposed:

- (1) Disbarment;
- (2) Suspension from the practice of law for a period exceeding six (6) months;
- (3) Revocation of notarial commission and disqualification as notary public for not less than two (2) years; or
- (4) A fine exceeding [PHP] 100,000.00. (Underscoring supplied)

Appositely, the Court notes respondent's repeated disregard of the IBP-CBD's orders and disrespect of the board proceedings. Records evince that despite being required to do so, respondent failed to file his answer, mandatory conference brief, and position paper. He likewise failed to appear at the scheduled mandatory conference despite due notice. Section 38, paragraph (b)(7) of the CPRA<sup>43</sup> considers the failure to comply with the orders of the IBP in relation to an administrative case as an aggravating circumstance.<sup>44</sup> However, considering that respondent is hereby meted with the supreme penalty of disbarment, the aggravating circumstance becomes *non momentum est*.

<sup>41</sup> See *Hosoya v. Atty. Contado*, A.C. No. 10731, October 5, 2021 [*Per Curiam, En Banc*].

<sup>42</sup> See *Atty. Saludares v. Atty. Saludares*, A.C. No. 10612, January 31, 2023 [*Per Curiam, En Banc*], *Hosoya v. Contado*, *supra* note 38.

<sup>43</sup> SECTION 38. Modifying circumstances. — In determining the appropriate penalty to be imposed, the Court may, in its discretion, appreciate the following mitigating and aggravating circumstances:

....  
(b) Aggravating Circumstances:

....

(7) Failure to comply with the orders of the Court and the IBP in relation to an administrative case; . . .

<sup>44</sup> See *Pontiano v. Atty. Gappi*, A.C. No. 13118, June 28, 2022 [*Per J. Rosario, En Banc*] and *Jacolbia v. Atty. Panganiban*, 871 Phil. 33, 41-42 (2020) [*J. Perlas-Bernabe, En Banc*].

**WHEREFORE**, the Court finds and ordains respondent Atty. Vincenzo Nonato M. Taggug **GUILTY** of Gross Immorality in violation of Sections 1 and 2, Canon II, and Canon VI of the Code of Professional Responsibility and Accountability, for which he is **DISBARRED** from the practice of law effective upon receipt of this Decision. His name is **ORDERED** stricken off from the Roll of Attorneys.

Let a copy of this Decision be attached to Atty. Vincenzo Nonato M. Taggug's personal record in the Office of the Bar Confidant.

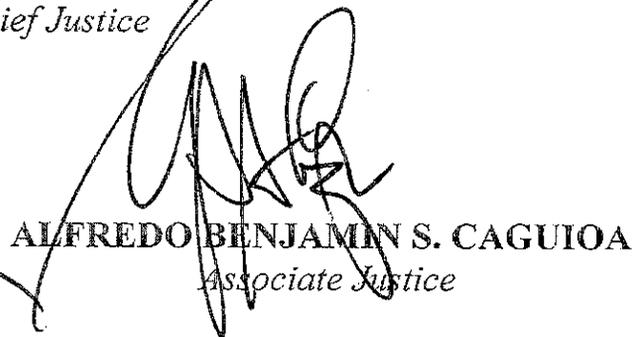
Furnish a copy of this Decision to the Integrated Bar of the Philippines for its information and guidance; and the Office of the Court Administrator for dissemination to all courts of the Philippines.

**SO ORDERED.**

**WE CONCUR:**

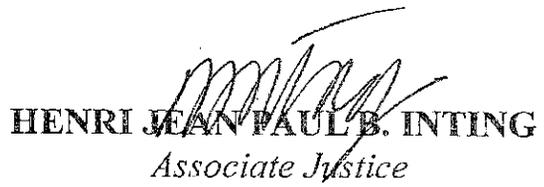
  
ALEXANDER G. GESMUNDO  
Chief Justice

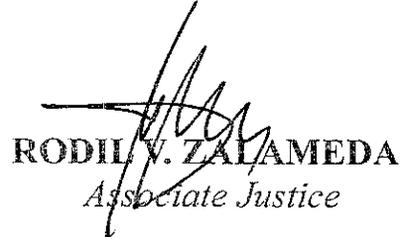
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sup. roll*  
  
MARVIC M.V.F. LEONEN  
Associate Justice

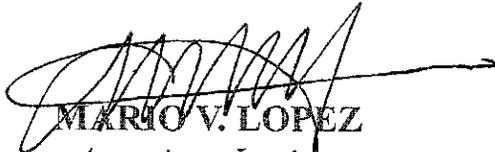
  
ALFREDO BENJAMIN S. CAGUIOA  
Associate Justice

  
RAMON PAUL L. HERNANDO  
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*On Official Business*  
AMY C. LAZARO JAVIER  
Associate Justice

  
HENRI JEAN PAUL B. INTING  
Associate Justice

  
RODIL V. ZALAMEDA  
Associate Justice



**MARIO V. LOPEZ**  
*Associate Justice*



**SAMUEL H. GAERLAN**  
*Associate Justice*



**RICARDO E. ROSARIO**  
*Associate Justice*



**JHOSEP V. LOPEZ**  
*Associate Justice*



**JAPAR B. DIMAAMPAO**  
*Associate Justice*



**JOSE MIDAS P. MARQUEZ**  
*Associate Justice*



**ANTONIO T. KHO, JR.**  
*Associate Justice*



**MARIA FILOMENA D. SINGH**  
*Associate Justice*