



**PRESENTATION OF**  
**THE LENTEN MESSAGE OF THE HOLY FATHER**  
**FOR LENT 2001**

On the morning of 9 January 2001 a Press Conference was held in the Holy See Press Office to present the Message of the Holy Father for Lent 2001 on the theme "Love is not resentful (1 Cor 13:5).

Following is the intervention of His Excellency Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes, President of the Pontifical Council "Cor Unum" and that of Mrs Rose Busingye, born in Uganda and responsible for the "Meeting Point" in Kampala, an Ugandan NGO which assists AIDS victims and their families.

**Address of His Excellency Archbishop Paul Josef Cordes**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two weeks ago the Holy Father sent me to El Salvador. I was charged with the task of taking material help and an expression of comfort to the victims, the Pastors and workers in that area impacted by the earthquake. It is a responsibility that in recent times I have been called upon to exercise more often, an onerous task, but gratifying. Each time one is able to reach out and touch the great sensitivity of today's human beings towards those suffering. Also in El Salvador, I was struck by the amount of financial assistance that States, and not least of all the Catholic organisations, had placed at the disposal of the victims. It is truly laudable, that the cry of the poor finds a response on such a vast scale.

The visit, however, did not only confront me with the generosity and compassion of the human soul. You know that up until 1992, the country was torn by a civil war; Two political forces, Arena and Frente, were opponents and fought to a bloody conclusion. The wounds are still not yet healed. At times I encountered tensions and hostility that sprung up. In some local meetings, that in reality should have been to co-ordinate assistance, they impeded it. They created suspicion and accusations of favouritism for party friends in the distribution of help.

It is a truly sad experience. Not even the disgrace fills in the ideological gaps. However another important lesson is that the misery and destruction begin in the hearts of human beings. I have had similar experiences in my visits to the Balkans, Rwanda and Mozambique.

Today, in preparation for Easter, we present this year's Lenten Message of the Holy Father. It is titled: "Love is not resentful". It is possible that public opinion is a little surprised that it has such a spiritual emphasis. Normally we are in the habit of having an appeal of the Holy Father to give alms. Instead, it begins with the words, "Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem" - Jerusalem, the name of the place, and synonymous with the definitive salvation for all humanity by means of the Cross of Christ and his resurrection. In this way, the Holy Father underlines how the true happiness of the human being has a

spiritual foundation, coming from God and actualised in his Son. In our struggle against human suffering, in aiming at the well being of mankind, this dimension cannot be forgotten. It is for the believer that sin in the catastrophe cries louder than the baby in tears, even if this crying baby moves us more.

The Holy Father then concretises the consequences of evil in our hearts; he speaks of the "... marks of hatred and violence among peoples ... among groups and factions within a nation itself (no. 3). For that reason, he makes a strong appeal to our openness in reconciling ourselves - with God and with our neighbour. It brings to mind the famous phrase of the Apostle of the People: "Love is not resentful" (1 Cor 13:5). In this way the Holy Father identifies in the Lenten Season a special opportunity to forgive and live the truth of this phrase: "Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Father gives to us in Christ his forgiveness and this encourages us to live in love, considering the other not as an enemy but as a brother" (no. 5).

This spiritual accent would certainly be misunderstood if we would recognise in this a drift to spiritualism. The reconciliation with our neighbour that God offers is expressed in the good deed (cf. attachment). It is not by chance that the Message states: "A heart reconciled with God and with neighbour is a generous heart" (no. 5). In this way Pope John Paul II encourages us to carry out the traditional Lenten collection, which should not be forgotten. Those who preach the love of God must take care that this love becomes a reality. Precisely in the case of need, the gift received, necessary for survival, awakes a new hope and trust in the future. Our Press Conference has therefore, in addition to presenting the words of the Holy Father, a second emphasis.

During a pilgrimage, the local authorities of Milan presented the Holy Father with a gift of one billion lire for Africa. The sum has been given to "Cor Unum" which has decided to use these funds for a project for assistance to AIDS Orphans in Uganda.

The International Herald Tribune of 6 February 2001 states that there are actually 12 million AIDS Orphans. (You can also consult the paper distributed.) Who are these orphans? They are less than 18 years of age and have lost one or both parents and live in a precarious situation because they were abandoned and alone or because they are infected with the virus, or because they are dishabilitated by some disease. Sometimes they themselves must be head of the family because they have the responsibility for younger brothers and sisters.

The Holy Father speaks for the victims of this terrible disease. In the Apostolic Exhortation ECCLESIA IN AFRICA he writes, "The battle against AIDS ought to be everyone's battle. Echoing the voice of the Synod Fathers, I too ask pastoral workers to bring to their brothers and sisters affected by AIDS all possible material, moral and spiritual comfort (no. 116). Following these indications, the Catholic Church is working in these areas in various ways:

- by forming pastoral and health care workers and youth themselves
- by trying to prevent through the education and consciousness raising to the responsible love lived in the family
- by caring and assisting in the health area with the engagement of medical personnel, carrying out programmes of assistance to victims and creating rehabilitation and accommodation centres for the sick, and supporting the other members of the family;
- by following in a pastoral way the sick and their families, most of all those alone and abandoned, for example the orphans of parents killed by AIDS.

CAFOD, CRS, Misereor and many other Catholic agencies of assistance have worked in this area in a co-ordinated manner since 1988. From the beginning one of the most important categories taken into consideration were the children. In addition to health care, it is particularly important to work so as to overcome discrimination and the fears linked to this disease, which marginalised the victims. I stress that for the Church it is important to have a global approach to the problem which is not limited to simple medical care or prevention but that includes the totality of the human person and aims to the responsibility of each person. Education, the relationship to the community, acceptance of responsibility in marriage and for family life are essential.

It is well known that Uganda is one of the most severely impacted countries by this scourge. For example, at the end of 1997 the prevalence of the infection of HIV in Ugandan adults was 9.51%. In that period 1,700,000 children were orphaned due to the disease. On the other hand in Uganda, thanks to prevention, major achievements were reached in the fight against the disease: in some rural areas the percentage of women between 10 to 20 years of age infected by HIV dropped from 4.4% in 1989-90 to 1.4% in 1996-97, (UNAIDS statistics of July 2000). We were willing to support a recovery project in such a stricken country in order to demonstrate that with good will and the help of many, important results can be achieved in this area.

Vatican City State

9 February 2001

## **ROSE'S SPEECH BEFORE THE VATICAN'S PRESS-GALLERY**

Friday February 9, 2001

I would like to begin by thanking the Holy Father. Allow me to say that he is also the Father of everything that I have been doing from the very beginning. Throughout my life no one has ever shown me such a way of giving witness to human value, the value of the person. I have learned from his untiring and constant insistence on the conscience of what man is. I would like to thank You Holy Father, not so much because You are helping us with funding, but rather because You allow my own person to be whole.

If faith determines my work, then the unity of my person is safeguarded. Faith, that is to say the sense of responsibility in the face of something much larger than myself.

As all my work pivots on the human being, it is necessary that faith permeate the way I act, thus generating the correct subject so that you know how to treat the other person well.

At present, it is popular to undertake various projects and it is quite easy to confuse or substitute man with that which we must or can do for him. And then when things do not go as expected, we become violent to him and to ourselves as well.

What really matters is positive value, which technical development has utilised, so that man is not a mechanical object, a cog in the machine.

Man is a composition of needs. If we cannot perceive that, if we do not possess this sensitivity, it is like passing him by with indifference.

In Uganda many have undertaken projects to distribute condoms, defend human rights, overcome poverty, defend women and children, etc. However, these simply pertain to

projects and never to the person. The person is nobody, reduced to his problems.

For example, a person has AIDS or a headache, I am dealing with AIDS, not with the person suffering from AIDS. It is not possible to cure a piece of a human being, you have to cure the person. Touching only a part of the person implies touching whole of his body.

I work with the AIDS victims, children, adults and orphans. It is an adventure and it is even entertaining, since I face wishes, characters, needs, traditions and attitudes which are totally different. It is interesting to work with what is called "man and his needs".

Why help people? Who are they to us? And who am I?

"Meeting Point" is the concrete experience of a group of friends who have found themselves in the position of facing the HIV/AIDS issue, either because they are personally suffering or someone in their family or amongst their close friends is affected by AIDS and they desire to discover a sense of suffering and death.

The purpose of "Meeting Point" is not to allow AIDS victims to face alone their sickness and death. This is possible only through a mature and daily companionship which takes all needs into account.

First of all we offer a human relationship, a friendship which with time deepens and whereby the children and the sick discover how to face reality with liberty and joy unknown before and along with them we grow.

Alice, 46 years of age and suffering from AIDS for 10 years, was desperate, looking for drugs to hasten her death. I did not know what to do about her. Before going to work, I would go visit her and sometimes stayed there without saying a word, I could not even comfort her. After a week, crying she told me: "You know, I had my husband, I have six children, the relationship with my husband was the only relationship which meant something to me, it filled me with meaning. Now he is no longer there, it is as if everything has lost its meaning, I lack consistency, I feel lost, I just want to die, help me die now. I will not tell anyone." That was eight years ago. Many people accuse me of having given her some special medicine, she now weighs around 90 kilos and she says: "You simply have to look up to someone having a sense of life, and you also will live." Now she is a volunteer at "Meeting Point", since she wants to do what I do.

Our friendship with the sick and their families is a school where we learn how to realistically and truly love the life of others and their destiny. Condoms and fear are a negative approach, proposing no solutions to cope with the challenge of the epidemic.

We offer our patients and young people psychological support, along with

advice on basic health and proper sexual behaviour. I have already told you that it is an adventure working with adults, youth and children. There is a lot to discover and it cannot all be said today: "I have understood what man needs".

It so happens that I was happy about the time, the money, the food and the medicines that I gave my patients. Then, the opposite occurred. In spite of everything, at a certain time the children, instead of going to school began spending their time in the trash, they refused to talk or pretended they were sick so as not to go to school, or they would hide under their beds or behind the house, or they would not eat. The sick refused medicine, nor did they want to eat. I felt like leaving everything and running away. That is how the question came to me: "But who are these people to me?" and "But who am I to them?"

Up until a short time ago everybody in Uganda knew that they belonged to a tribe, a clan, a family: one knew that he was someone. Now that has lost meaning: families have disintegrated, tribes no longer are concerned with the general interest, but only for their particular interests. Once a child used to belong to the whole tribe, to a whole people, and that gave him consistency and dignity.

Now children and women find themselves without defences, without dignity, and they become melancholy, without any will to live and without expectations.

They do not have a value for their families, after all this wives do not have value for their husbands, nor husbands for their wives. For whom do we live? For whom do we get married? For whom do we procreate?

Losing the very idea of ourselves has made us lose the sense of everything. Having lost the point which gave meaning to them, they no longer know why they must go to school or why they must take medicine, or talk, or whatever. In the end, they do not trust anyone.

What we have tried to do is basically enter into a relationship with them. It is apparent that we are not there to replace their parents, but it is apparent that we love them, that they are important and that they are valued by us. It is not possible to give the idea of the dignity expressed by the formula "being someone" if not one within a relationship.

"Meeting Point" is present in the suburbs of Kampala, Hoima and Kitgum. Kampala is a town built upon seven hills and there is a slum at the foot of each one of these hills. We go through the slums every morning. In the city many people suffer from AIDS. As a result the problem of orphans continually grows. If orphans are not cared for, they will end up living in the streets.

As the population grows, so also the more the disease spreads and this causes great confusion about judgements and feelings, among which are dominant fear, shame and rejection by relatives for their sickness. This adds up to great difficulty. There are no families welcoming orphans, whose numbers are growing.

Women and men between the ages of 20 and 45, that is to say the most active section of population, are the most affected by the sickness. Most of them die in great poverty after long suffering, with a sense of helplessness and having had to give up their employment.

At present we are giving assistance to about 600 sick registered at "Meeting Point" and nearly 1,000 orphans throughout Kampala.

We care for the sick from a medical viewpoint visiting them at home and taking medicine to those who cannot afford the costs of hospitalisation. Of major assistance to orphans is the paying of their school fees, so that they can at least attend primary school. We distribute food and other goods of primary importance: blankets, soap, pans, etc.

We also care for widows and the sick also from the legal point of view - (problems pertaining to heritage, adoptions, etc.).

I am not here to describe all that we do. But what I do want to tell you and that is really close to my heart is the human person, that which concerns man. I know that you know this but as I work with them in Africa, my frailty appears more vividly before my eyes. Since I cannot stand alone, it is much easier to have an intuition of man's greatness and of how much the human being is worth, an absolutely unassailable value.

The human person is something which internally contains a complexity or mixture of

emotion, wrath, reaction and tenderness which is inconceivable in any other natural phenomenon. Therefore the things we use such as time, money, food, medicines are but a tool an expression for telling the person that they are worth more than the whole world is worth and that they are responsible for this and for their own lives. It is not a collective responsibility. If it is not belonging to every single man, then it is not necessary, but completely useless. That is why we need responsible people to look up to. To be precise when using instruments on a person you need to love that person, and have consideration for that person.

In the face of the drama of the life we lead in Africa - diseases, wars, conflicts - to be part of our happiness, we need someone having passion for our dignity, and respect for our person.

My teacher used to tell me that the novelty in the world is when man belongs to something, for it is within the experience of belonging that everything changes. From this a new society, a new civilisation can be generated.

This is what I have seen happen in my life and in the lives of the people I care for. It seemed something abstract, but then I saw people change, I saw the sick that I thought would never change, change - and they have changed me, too.

The children who call me Mum - because they have found life. The prostitute Vicky who says, "I do not know what 'Meeting Point' is, but what I do know is that there are people who care for me, and that I want to live for them - Akello's children, a woman at the refugees' camp.

Well, I have already said that belonging to someone appears as something abstract, instead it is the awareness of what the human person is. The responsibility toward the dignity of that person can change the face of the world and go as far as tearing down the structures that frame it. What I wish is that the object of my work is One, that is to say the relationship with a friend. It is this position that can make me change and create something new within the existing structures.

Thank you.

