

SPIRITUAL GUIDELINES

July 2000

For the management, staff and benefactors of the Charity

Aid to the Church in Need

A Work of love

1. It was in response to a call by Pope Pius XII. that our organisation began in 1947, in the Norbertine abbey of Tongerlo in Belgium, as a pastoral relief campaign for the priests and faithful of German nationality who had been expelled from the communist sphere of influence. It originated in a country that in 1940, for the second time in a quarter of a century, had been overrun, occupied and plunged into misery by German troops. The hatred against the Germans was so great at the time that almost no one thought it either possible or opportune to organise a relief campaign so soon after the War for the recent enemies.

2. At the time I saw it as my priestly duty to preach reconciliation and restore love in the Church and in the world. Such love demanded a personal commitment to the hungry, the naked, the prisoners and all the others included by Christ in His description of the Last Judgement and in whom He Himself lies hidden. It demanded a readiness to recognise and love Christ in the least of His brethren - and not excluding our enemies. For love of our enemies is of the essence of Christianity.

People are better than we think

3. In the early postwar years, many thought it better to play down this truth because it demanded far too great an effort of self-mastery. It was then that I discovered that people are far better than we think. They await only the burning word that will enkindle their hearts. They are prepared to show heroic courage if only we have the courage to ask genuine sacrifices of them and convince them that these sacrifices are truly necessary for the Kingdom of God.

4. It is our duty, therefore, to proclaim the law of Christian love in its undiminished fullness, and never to adapt the demands of Christ to our human weakness. It is our duty to train those whom we would win over to our cause to think like Christ, Who demands that we be perfect, as our Heavenly Father is perfect, bestowing His sunshine and His rain, His grace and His love on good and bad, on friend and foe alike.

The friends and the enemies of God

5. The friends of God, who have been entrusted to our prayers and our love, have grown ever more numerous. The 14 million Germans who, in 1946 under the Yalta and Potsdam agreements, had been deported in the most inhuman manner from the former Eastern territories of Germany and the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and scattered like sand among the ruins of postwar Germany, were soon to share their fate with millions of refugees from the communist regimes of Europe and Asia who had opted for freedom and were now in need of pastoral care.

6. Already by the early 1950's the harrowing reports of these refugees about the religious persecution in their countries had moved us to extend the scope of our work and help the persecuted Church throughout the communist world. Indeed, this soon became the greatest and most important task of our organisation.

7. From 1961 onwards, at the request of Pope John XXIII., we again extended our aid programme to include pastoral help for the imperilled Church in Latin America, Africa and Asia - thus complementing the existing worldwide aid initiatives of other organisations to combat hunger and disease and provide development aid in the Third World.

8. Later, with the post-conciliar crisis, the Church in many countries began to be an imperilled Church which, with good reason, sought and received help from us.

9. Now that communism has collapsed it is clear to us that among all these tasks - most of which will continue to occupy us for years to come - priority must be given to helping the churches of Eastern Europe as they struggle to rise again from the ruins.

10. Since the now vital task of re-evangelising Russia falls within the time-honoured sphere of our Orthodox sister Church, our programme was again extended in 1993 to include help for the Orthodox Church - a new dimension of our work and at the same time a sign of selfless love and a path towards reconciliation.

11. We can scarcely do too much to help all these children and friends of God in their need. Following the example of Christ, Who gave His life for His friends, we must be ready to make the greatest sacrifices. Only if we unhesitatingly measure our duty of charity against this supernatural and superhuman yardstick will our organisation continue to be a school of love, capable of effecting miracles of charity and deserving of God's blessing.

12. Reconciliation with the Germans was achieved, but there is still no lack of enemies today, above all enemies of God, who need our love. The enemies we should now especially love include all those who persecute or betray the true Faith and thereby share the blame for the sorry situation of the Church in need.

13. Love towards these enemies demands that we pray for them without ceasing, in the sure hope that they will be converted. Every bastion and stronghold of persecution and distortion of the Faith must be besieged by legions of humble souls who will concentrate their prayers on these tyrants and false prophets who seek to destroy the Kingdom of God. This remains one of the most vital tasks of our organisation.

The New Evangelisation

14. Today, in the religious press and even in churches and seminaries it is all too often not the Gospel of Jesus Christ but rather secular humanism or Marxist ideas that we hear proclaimed, and wide sections of the people of God - and especially the youth - have sunk back into religious ignorance. There can be no doubt, therefore, that we have a pastoral duty to perform towards our co-workers and benefactors who are called to practice love for the Church in need via our organisation.

15. Thus our contribution towards the new evangelisation within the Church consists not only in unequivocal obedience towards papal and episcopal teaching authority and in persevering prayer for the Pope, the bishops, priests, deacons, religious and all those active in teaching or proclaiming the Faith, but also in proclaiming those Gospel truths that form the supernatural basis of our Work and cultivating those virtues upon which its continued survival depends. In developing, deepening and propagating this spirituality particular to our association, and in impressing it anew on each succeeding generation, we will strive to avoid all influence of neomodernist and false doctrines and instead be guided solely by the Word of God and the teachings of the Church.

16. In doing so, we should remember that Christ will always be a sign of contradiction. It is impossible to proclaim His Gospel in such a way that no-one is offended, except by suppressing certain truths. This is impermissible and can be of no advantage to our organisation. For anyone who writes or preaches in terms so veiled as not to offend will

also be unable to console or to inspire. In today's spiritual confusion, to which there is no end yet in sight, we must offer the faithful clarity, security, consolation and courage. Only then will those seeking God help us, with amazing generosity, to continue the work entrusted to us by the Church.

Boundless trust in God

17. Not only man but God too is much better than we think. We can hardly ever go too far in trusting to His providence. From years of experience, we know that all the wonderful things that Christ has taught us about the goodness and faithfulness of our Heavenly Father are literally true. God has never disappointed our trust in Him. Again and again He has helped us to fulfil the promises - often rash ones from a human point of view - that we have made to the Church in need for His sake.

18. This should not surprise us. It is perfectly natural. For the same God who plants in our hearts the desire to help the Church in need supplements with His almighty grace all that is lacking in us weak humans and awakens in the hearts of the benefactors the love needed to alleviate the need. In drawing up our relief programme, therefore, it is not what we can do but rather what we should do that must be decisive. For we can do all things in the power of Him who strengthens us.

19. And so it is a lack of faith when because of economic recession, or of a loss in the exchange of currencies, or of the death of a few outstanding benefactors, we lack the courage to increase our budget, despite new and yet greater commitments, and instead reduce it. For it cannot be God's will that we should take fright at a mission - such as that awaiting us in Russia, for example - because we no longer have the faith to believe that God will inspire our benefactors to still greater generosity. Why should He cease to do what he has always done, namely to match our income to the promises we have made? And so those responsible for the financial side of our organisation should not forget the wonderful history of God's power in our weakness and we all should strive to cultivate a boundless trust in Divine Providence. God will not disappoint us!

20. But if this boundless trust in God is not to be presumptuous we must remain unswervingly loyal to the task entrusted to us, namely that of bringing pastoral help the Church wherever she is persecuted, threatened, undermined or destroyed - and thus a Church in need.

A spiritual bulwark against atheism

21. The principal cause of this distress is militant atheism, of which communism was for seventy years the most dangerous protagonist. This false teaching is perhaps the greatest danger that has ever threatened, and still threatens, the Church. At Fatima Our Lady foretold its beginning and its end and indicated the means to combat it. Yet even after the demise of communism its bitter seeds will continue for tens of years to come to sprout in the generations it has contaminated and to present a danger for the future. Such a situation calls for responses and counter measures that in former times would have led to the founding of a new religious order.

22. For over forty years we did all we could to ease the needs created by communism, by simply trying to do God's will from one day to the next, occasionally by improvisation. Now, to our astonishment, we find that our enterprise numbers hundreds of thousands of valiant Christians who, clothed in the armour of God, have warded off communism by their prayers, healed the wounds it has dealt, consoled its victims, honoured those it has martyred, supported its dissidents, prevented its spread in the Third World and encompassed its spiritual downfall.

23. Not by any preconceived human plan, but in accordance with the will of God and in obedience to the supreme authority of the Church, our association has developed from a temporary relief campaign for German priests expelled from the East into a worldwide spiritual movement which seeks, by prayer, sacrifice, conversion of life, information and loving help, to ease the sufferings inflicted by militant and practical atheism throughout the world.

24. In all our efforts to make our contribution there were one or two initiatives that we were sadly unable to finally realise. Thus we had hoped, by our support, to revive a theological faculty in Königstein for the seminarians who had been uprooted from their own countries in the East, in order to provide an urgently needed sounder priestly formation during the time of the post-conciliar crisis in the West. And similarly, the initial resounding success of the "Building Order" which we founded in 1953 did not last, because the contact with our organisation was broken. But who knows what God still has in mind for us? For everything is in His hands.

Our unwavering resistance

25. Given this inevitable evolution it would be wrong to give precedence to the activities that date back to the beginnings of our Work over the tasks that were added later. The aid for the endangered Church in the Third World and the battle for the integrity of faith and morals in the Western World certainly come within our range of duties. For the spiritual dangers and the ecclesial ruin in the Third World and in the affluent West can be traced to the same satanic power that has elsewhere persecuted the Church and scattered millions of refugees across the globe. Our resistance to this power is unwavering. For both the militant atheism of the Marxists and the practical atheism of the materialistic West have the Prince of Darkness as their common source.

26. Thus our support for the Church where she is threatened by poverty, repression and Marxist infiltration in the Third World is no less important than our aid for that part of the Church - whether still persecuted or now emerging from the ruins - that has been particularly entrusted to us. By the same token the defence of faith, morals, authority and Church discipline in the Western World is as much a part of our responsibilities as the aid for the pastoral ministry to the refugees and the displaced - a goal that was the starting point for our work and which embraces all our brethren in the Faith who have been forced to leave their homes as a result of atheist persecution, ethnic cleansing, war or other reasons. Nothing may be omitted from these objectives, because we have been called to accept the global spiritual challenge that confronts the Universal Church.

Pastoral in character

27. The pastoral character of our Work is the distinctive feature that gives it a special place among the many charitable campaigns that developed in the Church after the war. The earliest tasks entrusted to us were pastoral in nature. In 1947 we were asked to provide the means of life for 3,000 "rucksack priests". Next we had to enable these priests to minister pastorally to their scattered flocks. Then we were asked to help with the training of new priests, support the chapel truck mission, provide transport for priests, etc. We have never relinquished this pastoral character of our work - not even when it became fashionable to put social progress above the narrow path to heaven, development aid above missionary work, violent liberation above redemption via the Cross, the material above the spiritual, and the temporal above the eternal.

Specific tasks

28. From this pastoral character emerge the aims that we wish to pursue and the projects to which our organisation must give precedence. Chief among these are the training of priests, religious, catechists and lay pastoral workers, the provision of bibles, liturgical and theological books and catechetical materials, the promotion of post-graduate theological studies, the establishment of contemplative convents, the material support of needy priests, religious and others in the service of the Church, the construction and repair of churches, chapels, seminaries, convents and other Church properties, the provision of transport for pastoral workers, and the apostolate of the media. In all these aspects of our aid priority was always given to the Church of the Catacombs, just as it must now be given to the Church that is rising from the ruins in the former communist countries. This applies likewise to the reconciliation with the Orthodox Church as a *conditio sine qua non* for the new evangelisation of the former Soviet Union.

The Church in need in the Western World

29. In Western Europe too, and elsewhere in the Western world, we have a mission to perform. Here, among other things, we support those who are combating the apostasy from Rome and the increasing moral corruption, defending unborn life and fighting for orthodoxy in the religious media. This is not just a pastoral service that we render to the people of God but also an essential condition of the continued survival of our organisation. For local churches that are mortally sick or self-destructive will soon be incapable of contributing further to the easing of the spiritual need in Eastern Europe or in the Third World. Every effort to give our benefactors the spiritual nourishment that too many modern pastors withhold from them is important for recruitment to the legion of praying and sacrificing souls who follow Mary's call at Fatima and thereby try to bring about the conversion of Russia and establish peace.

30. This supernatural, pastoral dimension of our aid appeals less to the human imagination than do campaigns for tangible needs and catastrophes, and this makes it more difficult for us to inspire generosity. But we must accept this disadvantage in the knowledge that the pastoral aid that we provide the Church is the basis for the alleviation of all other needs.

Our relations with other organisations

31. It is this pastoral character that clearly distinguishes our association from the purely charitable, social, economic and technical relief campaigns of other organisations. We should always respect the differences between ourselves and these others and thus, in appealing to the generosity of our benefactors, we should not employ reasons or arguments used by other organisations for their particular activities. And if others feel themselves called to support the Church in need independently of our organisation, we should be glad of the good they do and look upon them not as rivals but rather as comrades in arms. We should avoid hampering or obstructing new initiatives simply because we ourselves did not launch them. For the Spirit of God blows where it wills and the Lord calls whoever He will to work in His vineyard.

Humility and gratitude

32. Only great humility can save us from the sin of power-seeking and tyranny into which those with money at their disposal so easily fall. Let us never forget that we are merely the channels through which the money from generous persons flows.

33. This humility will be expressed first and foremost towards our benefactors. Without them we can do nothing! Our work is completely dependent on them. By virtue of their generous love they are of more value to our work than any one of us, who merely receive their gifts and distribute them to the poor. Their thanks are due rather to the benefactors than to us.

34. Gratitude towards our benefactors, especially those who can give only the widow's mite, should therefore be frequently expressed in the publications of our association and likewise be shown in personal letters of thanks to individual benefactors. Here, priority should be given to the sick, the aged and to those who bear their cross alone, praying and suffering for the Church in need. Letters in which our donators confide their problems of conscience to the Ecclesiastical Assistants or to other priests in the association should be answered with the greatest care and love. This is part of the pastoral service that we owe to our benefactors.

Collegial decisions

35. But our humility and gratitude must be especially evident in a great sense of responsibility for the donations entrusted to us and in the utmost economy in expenditure.

36. Those who decide on the distribution of our aid should be guided solely by the aims of the association and by the criteria governing our assistance. They must never forget that they are administering not only the money but, first and foremost, the love of our benefactors.

37. The intention of the benefactor must always be the ultimate guide. Partisanship or favouritism, careless indifference, waste or arbitrariness must be totally excluded in distributing the funds entrusted to us. Therefore, all decisions as to the granting or withholding of subsidies and the amount to be given should be taken collegially.

A preferential love for the poor

38. Christ continues and completes His Passion in all the refugees, the persecuted, the oppressed or spiritually isolated who must still tread their bitter Way of the Cross. As once Veronica and Simon of Cyrene comforted or helped Him on the way to Calvary, so now we too are called upon to help Him in the poorest of His brothers, with whom He so expressly identifies Himself. Thus it follows that we honour and love the poor as we do Christ Himself.

39. If, in a spirit of faith, we keep this basic rule of Christian love in mind, we will always treat our needy brothers with the greatest reverence - and above those whose souls, character and way of thinking have been conditioned and damaged by an atheist upbringing, or who, under the compulsion of a totalitarian dictatorship, have become accustomed to behaving in an abnormal manner. We will patiently bear with their imperfections and failings, for these may be the ragged clothing beneath which Christ lies hidden, or the wounds inflicted by want or by years of oppression. We will avoid humiliating them because we are their servants. We will have understanding for the desperate situation in which they find themselves and we will not add yet further to their difficulties by subjecting them to all the dictates of an excessive bureaucracy. Therefore we will not swamp them with papers and forms which they do not know what to do with and which will only discourage or embitter them. When requiring an account of them we will restrict ourselves to the bare necessities, for it is better that a few should abuse our trust than that all should suffer on account of our mistrust.

Not domination but service

40. We will maintain as modern and effective an administrative apparatus as possible, not as an end in itself but so as to be better able to help, for it is the executive organ of our love. We will avoid accumulating capital or large reserves for future needs, because God will provide for His children tomorrow too. We will limit the annual cash surplus to a minimum and distribute the funds sent to us as quickly as possible. And if we have to turn down a request because it does not come within the scope of our aims or exceeds the organisation's financial capabilities, we will impart our negative decision in a brotherly manner and never neglect to pray that God will alleviate this need by other means.

41. The poor will be grateful to us only if we are not domineering towards them but serve them with humility. Their gratitude is the gratitude of Christ and the only guarantee of His blessing upon the work that we perform in His service.

A Universal association

42. When in 1984 our association was raised to the status of a public, universal association, dependent on the Holy See, it was entrusted with an official task for the Universal Church. The Statutes approved by the Holy See endorsed the existing, largely centralised organisational structure. In the future, too, we will be able to discharge our task only if we succeed in combining all individual and national energies into a single unity of thought, prayer, effort and action. This unity not only demands that we form a community of love but also requires a strong, central authority.

43. The central leadership should be responsible for the appointment or confirmation of the national boards, the national directors and ecclesiastical assistants and for the contents of the periodical newsletters to our 'Dear friends', for a harmonisation of our information and publicity work worldwide and for the administration and distribution of the donations. Centralisation of this kind, which is justified by the universal character of our Work and by the global dangers to which the Church is exposed, offers not only protection against possible centrifugal and particularist tendencies, but also boosts the spiritual and financial strength of the Work. It facilitates the efficient administration of the funds entrusted to us, reduces the danger of faulty decisions in the administration of the donations and makes it possible to utilise the funds available in accordance with a strategy that goes beyond the comparatively limited horizons of the national offices.

44. This restriction on the autonomy of the national offices will continue to be acceptable in the long term only if the central leadership frequently consults those responsible for the national offices and succeeds in involving the national directors and the ecclesiastical assistants as indispensable co-workers and advisors on the running of the Association at international level.

45. Both through general international meetings and through contacts between individual national offices we should strive to promote mutual appreciation, strengthen the friendship among the leadership and ensure unity in diversity within our organisation. This unity is the indispensable prerequisite for the fruitfulness and continued growth of the association.

Fatima and our Work

46. Like Fatima, our organisation is inextricably linked with the historical event (1917) of the communist October revolution and its consequences - a revolution that was in its very essence a total rebellion against God. Thus there is an intimate connection between our association and Fatima. At Fatima Mary revealed the remedy for this rebellion. Her message was given little credence. And so the Second World War broke out. It ended with a victory for communism, which subjected a third of humanity. The consequences were millions of refugees, an Iron Curtain right across Europe and an unprecedented persecution of Christians. Our Work was founded in 1947 as a response to this.

47. In 1917 Mary warned us that whole nations would be destroyed if we do not convert. We do not know which nations are threatened with destruction in this way. We do not know whether it is a matter of spiritual, moral and psychological destruction, such as is seen today in many people of the post-communist East - and likewise in so many drug addicts and sexual perverts and as a general consequence of the materialism of the wealthy West. Or was Mary speaking of the physical destruction of entire countries? We do not know whether the great catastrophe can still be averted. We do not know whether we ourselves will be among the survivors. But we do know that Mary can crush the head of the Serpent. That is why we have consecrated our entire work to the Queen of the Rosary, Our Lady of Fatima, who has shown us the way that leads to victory over communism and its aftermath, and to the liberation of the persecuted Church. She did not speak of conforming to this world but of conversion, penance and the prayer of the Rosary. We should not reject her message.

Mary is our Mother, our Queen, our example, our helper, the great leader in the fight against the dragon, the Mediatrix of all the graces we need, and she is worthy of all praise, because out of her has risen the Sun of Righteousness, Christ our God.

Prayer to Mary

48. Therefore, Mother Mary, we come to you in the raging storm which the Prince of Darkness has unleashed. You see how millions of your Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant children have been deeply wounded, perverted or dehumanised, or suffer still under the terror of the atheists, who wish to tear down the Almighty from His throne and destroy His Kingdom in the hearts of the faithful. You see how million refugees have been uprooted and are in danger of losing all hope. You see how in the Third World countless exploited millions are stranded on the shores of our selfishness. And you see how the smoke of Satan has seeped even as far as the Holy of Holies; how the storm of confusion is battering even the safest haven in God's Church. Even the elect are torn from their moorings and away from God. You see how priests of every rank and dignity have lost their bearings and are sabotaging the course set by Peter, wrecking his barque in the midst of the foaming waters. And Jesus sleeps.

49. Mother, if even the Apostles lost their courage in the storm, you will understand our fear. Tell your Son to heed our cry of help: "Lord, save us, for we perish!" Yes, Mother, we are afraid in the face of the confusion, the division and the unfaithfulness to God, which are now spreading like a plague throughout the Church. Is not the rift that divides the People of God a collective sin against the Holy Spirit? Do you not see, Mother, that the strivings for unity with our separated brethren and the efforts to preach the old Faith in a new way go hand in hand with boundless excesses which are inflicting incalculable damage on the unity, peace, tranquillity of conscience and loyalty to their Faith of countless Catholics? What we are now witnessing is not a crisis of growth, but real decay; not the springtime with all its promise, but the dark autumn; not the bursting forth of new life, but the wholesale fall of dead branches and dry shoots that have lost all contact with the vine that is Christ. Instead of permeating the world with the leaven of the Gospel, innumerable Christians allow themselves to be thrown into turmoil by the leaven of the world, even though Christ has unequivocally broken with this world.

50. Mother, now that the need is at its greatest and the powers of darkness seem to have free rein, we come to you with childlike trust and implore your powerful aid. Now, swept away and rudderless on the tempest of this age, we place ourselves, together with the whole of disfigured humanity and our organisation for the Church in need, in your maternal hands. We consecrate ourselves to you, dear Virgin of Fatima. Preserve us in the love of your Son, protect us from the evil of this world and lead us safe to the heart of God. And grant, dear Mother, when we have passed through death's dark gate and stand before the Judgement Seat of your Son, that we may find you there with a smile in your eyes, and be able to say without fear: "Here we are, Mother".

Werenfried van Straaten, O.praem.

Koenigstein, July 2000