

## **Pope Cannot Exchange Vatican Treasure for Food**

Cardinal Explains Complications of Facebook Proposal

By Jesús Colina

VATICAN CITY, MARCH 16, 2009 ([Zenit.org](http://Zenit.org)).- The proposal of a member of the social networking Web site Facebook suggesting that the Vatican should exchange its treasures for food in Africa is an impossibility due to international law, says Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes.

The president of the Pontifical Council Cor Unum said this Friday to ZENIT at a press conference Friday in which he commented on the online petition titled "Exchange the Vatican's Treasures for Food for Africa. Do You Want to Sign a Petition?"

The cardinal noted that, apart from the ideological aspect of the proposal, the Pope cannot consider it because he is prevented from doing so by international law.

This Pontifical council is responsible for the direction and coordination among the charitable organizations and activities promoted by the Catholic Church.

Alberto Jueas Escudero of Spain launched the initiative, which now has more than 40,000 supporters. Escudero claims "it is a shameful to see the Vatican's riches and then watch the news."

He explained that what motivated him to issue this invitation was that he believes the Vatican "does not admit its errors. [...] It does not preach by example. Jesus was born in a cave and lived in poverty."

The youth concluded: "The Vatican is a disgrace! The Catholic religion is a disgrace!"

In answer to ZENIT's questions, Cardinal Cordes explained that he has heard similar proposals for the past 40 years, and that before it was even much more frequent.

When John Paul II called him to Rome to work in the Curia, he observed that "the climate against the Vatican was very strong."

He explained, "I had looked into [the status of the Vatican's holdings] and found out that the Church cannot do what it wants with the works of art that are in the Vatican."

## Duty

In reality, he said, the Church "has the duty to conserve the works of art in the name of the Italian state." He affirmed, "It cannot sell them."

The prelate recalled an incident in the 1970s when a benefactor made a donation to renovate the Collegio Teutonico inside the Vatican, and the residence director wanted to give this person a small statue -- of a meager value compared to the others in the Vatican Museums -- as a gesture of gratitude.

The German benefactor had a lot of problems with the Italian state, as he was accused of taking goods that Italy was charged with safeguarding.

"In every country there are a lot of measures for the defense of works of art, because the state has a duty to maintain them," Cardinal Cordes added, noting that the Holy See treasures are also part of Italian cultural history.

The Cor Unum president underlined the work of the Catholic Church in health services and education in various regions in Africa.

"When they come to meet the Pope, the African presidents recognize this," he said.

Without the Church, he affirmed, a huge part of those afflicted with AIDS would be abandoned, because the Church, with its network of hospitals, is the organization that cares for the largest number of people affected by the virus.

The cardinal noted that the Pope's upcoming March 17-23 visit to Cameroon and Angola is drawing the attention of the global media to Africa, and making the world more aware of the needs of that continent. He expressed the hope that the Papal trip will promote concrete acts of solidarity and respect.