

Cardinal Gerhard Müller: Spiritual renewal is the Church's foremost need

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Cardinal Gerhard Müller is seen at the Vatican in this 2016 file photo.(CNS photo/Paul Haring)

Rome, Italy, Nov 29, 2018 / 04:22 pm (**CNA/EWTN News**).- Cardinal Gerhard Müller said in a recent interview that the problem of clerical sex abuse must be countered primarily by spiritual renewal, prayer, and penance.

The prefect emeritus of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith said in **a Nov. 28 interview with Vatican Insider** that “We need spiritual renewal, prayer and penance, drawing on

the grace of the sacraments, reading and meditating on the Bible, entering into the spirit of Jesus Christ. We must be priests according to the heart of Jesus ... The priest is an alter Christus, not because of his skill or ability, but because he gives his heart for humankind. We must bear witness to this and in so doing restore the credibility of the Church so that people may encounter faith.”

He called canon law “a necessary aid to the Church,” in which “we have norms of divine law that we cannot change, but also norms of human, ecclesiastical law that we can change and update to better respond to the needs and circumstances to be faced. But, we, the Church, are a sacramental and spiritual reality and more important we are the dimensions of morality and faith: rules, norms, external discipline are not enough.”

Acknowledging that procedures “have been established to combat the phenomenon,” he said, “spiritual renewal and conversion are more important. There are priests who never go to spiritual exercises, never approach the confessional, never pray the breviary. And when the spiritual life is empty, how can a priest act according to Christ? He risks becoming a ‘mercenary’, as we read in the Gospel of John.”

Cardinal Müller called for the “parties” in the Church to “work together to overcome this crisis that is hurting the credibility of the Church ... We are all united in the revealed faith, and not by the prejudices of political ideologies. We are not a political entity, the Church was instituted by Jesus Christ.”

He suggested that the Pope could, to manage the crisis in the US, “appoint a commission of cardinals he trusts, to study the situation and then, on the basis of solid information, make some proposals, beyond oppositions, struggles between factions, mutual suspicions, and propaganda carried out by media campaigns. We need a solid base of information: only in this way decisions can be made for the future.”

Addressing episcopal accountability, the cardinal said, “We have sufficient norms in Canon Law, there is the *motu proprio Sacramentorum sanctitatis tutela* of 2001, there are the already existing norms of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, yet not always all the bishops have collaborated with our department. They have not informed as it is ought to be done. First we must do what is already established and indicated as necessary and obligatory by the existing norms.”

Discussing the thwarted effort of the USCCB to develop a code of conduct for bishops and to create a lay-led investigatory body, he said that “we must avoid confrontation and public controversy, and first discuss together to then arrive at a decision. We need to talk more before. I thought it was necessary for the presidency of the American Bishops’ Conference to first consult with our experts at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. The Holy Father is a single person, he cannot deal with everything. That is why there are the departments of the Roman Curia, to collaborate and arrive at a well-developed proposal to bring to the Pope.”

Speaking of the same-sex nature of much clerical abuse, Cardinal Müller rejected the “category” of homosexuals, and said that there are rather “concrete people who have certain tendencies, and there are temptations. Our hearts are wounded by the original sin and we must overcome temptations with grace, the new life in Jesus Christ.”

He called pedophilia and homosexuality “expressions of psychology that help the Church in her moral theology. But for us, the dimension remains the moral one: that is whether we act according to the Commandments, according to the holy will of God, or not. This is the problem for us.”

“We must collaborate with psychology and sociology, but we in the Church at the level of the Magisterium must not put these disciplines in the foreground,” Cardinal Müller stated.

“Instead we must base ourselves on moral theology. It is clear that according to God’s will, it is not possible for the lay faithful to have sex outside of marriage, and for a priest – who has committed himself to celibacy – it is not possible to have sex ... We must raise the moral level of the clergy.”

He also addressed poor episcopal appointments, saying, “it is possible that the Pope may appoint a person who is ‘false’, who is not suitable for the role, for the episcopate. Jesus Christ himself, even though he knew everything thanks to his divine intellect, left freedom to the traitor Judas. Everyone is then responsible for their sin: we can, through the process of selection with the Congregations, through all our human judgments, do everything possible to elect a good candidate.”

The CDF prefect emeritus said it is impossible for human persons “to formulate an absolute, perfect judgment: we do it according to our limited possibilities, according to what we are given to know. One must look for suitable candidates for the episcopate, but the Pope is not infallible in the nomination.”

Cardinal Müller also said, asked about Archbishop Carlo Maria Viganò, that “no one has the right to indict the Pope or ask him to resign! Clearly it is possible to have different opinions on the existing problems and on the ways to resolve them, but we must discuss them according to the roles of each and in the end, it is the cardinals, as representatives of the Church of Rome, who can help the Pope or ask the Pope for some explanations. But this must take place in private, in the proper places, and without ever making a public controversy with attacks that end up questioning the credibility of the Church and her mission.”

“I am personally convinced that Pope Francis is doing everything possible to counter the phenomenon of child abuse and to foster a new spirituality for priests, who must act according to the heart of Christ and do the good of all people,” he said.

Cardinal Müller also spoke recently to Life Site News, **telling Maike Hickson Nov. 21** regarding the US crisis that

“we will not succeed with the help of a lynch law and a general suspicion against the whole episcopacy or of ‘Rome.’ I do not see it as a solution that the laymen now take control, just because the bishops (as some believe) are not capable of doing so with their own strength. We cannot overcome shortcomings by turning upside down the hierarchical-sacramental constitution of the Church.”

“It would be important that the U.S. Bishops’ Conference assume its responsibility with independence and autonomy. The bishops are not employees of the Pope who are subject to directives nor, as in the military, generals who owe absolute obedience to the higher command. Rather, they carry together with the successor of Peter, as shepherds appointed by Christ Himself, responsibility for the Universal Church,” he said.

Cardinal Müller said “That McCarrick, together with his clan and a homosexual network, was able to wreak havoc in a mafia-like manner in the Church is connected with the underestimation of the moral depravity of homosexual acts among adults.”

He said the root of the crisis is “a secularization of the Church and the reduction of the priest to the role of a functionary ... According to this evil spirit, the Revelation concerning Faith and morals is being adapted to the world without God so that it does not interfere anymore with a life according to one’s own lusts and needs.”

Cardinal Müller stated that “the primacy of the Pope is being undermined by the sycophants and careerists at the papal court ... and not by those who counsel the Pope in a competent and responsible manner.”

The role of a bishop and cardinal is “to represent the teaching of the Catholic Faith, and not to justify the different private opinions of a Pope. His authority is extended over the revealed Faith of the Catholic Church and not over the individual theological opinions of himself or those of his advisers.”

Cardinal Müller said his supposed opponents “can perhaps accuse me of interpreting *Amoris Laetitia* in an orthodox way, but they cannot prove that I deviate from the Catholic doctrine. Additionally, it is irritating that theologically uneducated people are being promoted to the rank of bishops who, in turn, think that they have to thank the Pope for it by means of a childish submission.”

“The Magisterium of the bishops and of the Pope stand under the Word of God in Holy Scripture and Tradition and serves Him. It is not at all Catholic to say that the Pope as an individual person receives directly from the Holy Spirit the Revelation and that he may now interpret it according to his own whims while all the rest are to follow him blindly and mutely. *Amoris Laetitia* has to be absolutely in accordance with Revelation, and it is not we who have to be in accord with *Amoris Laetitia*, at least not in the interpretation which contradicts, in a heretical manner, the Word of God. And it would be an abuse of power to discipline those who insist upon an orthodox interpretation of this encyclical and of all the papal magisterial documents. Only he who is in the state of Grace can also fruitfully receive Holy Communion. This revealed truth cannot be toppled by any power in the world, and no Catholic may ever believe the opposite or be forced to accept the opposite.”

Cardinal Müller said that while he was CDF prefect “I did not oppose any innovation or reform. Because reform means renewal in Christ, not adaptation to the world.”

The cardinal said that if a priest “calls the blessing of homosexual relationships the result of a further development of doctrine ... it is nothing but the presence of atheism in Christianity. He does not theoretically deny the existence of God, but, rather, he denies Him as the source of morality by presenting that which is before God a sin as a blessing.”

And Cardinal Müller **spoke Nov. 29 to EWTN**, discussing in part the debate over a purported “gay lobby” in the Church.

While saying he doesn't know if there are "homosexual networks" in the Vatican, he affirmed that "there are high-level representatives of the Catholic Church who defend and promote beyond all measure people of this trend. But if the contents of the Catholic faith are called into question, they show themselves broadminded and powerless."