LA NUOVA BUSSOLA QUOTIDIANA DOMENICA
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INTERVIEW

Müller: “Not even the Pope can decide to bless gay couples”

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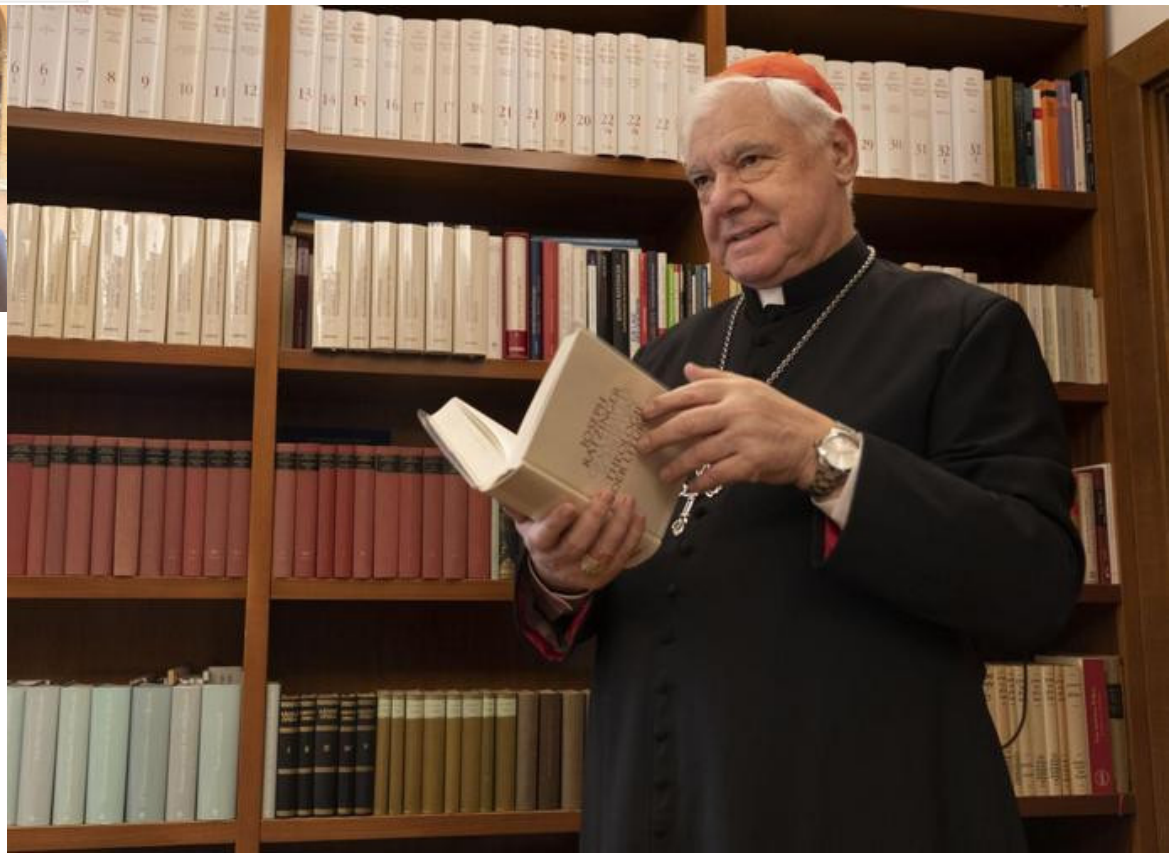

It is hard to imagine the apartment where Joseph Ratzinger lived until his election in 2005 in Borgo Pio in more suitable hands than it is now. Today, in fact, the tenant,Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller, is one of the few prelates who could address

Benedict XVI with the familiar *'tu'* and whom the German Pope himself wanted as prefect for the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2012. The flat, in fact, appears to guests as it probably was during the twenty-three years of stay of what the enemies disparagingly called the *panzerkardinal*: crammed full of books. The *Daily Compass* met with him on the occasion of the release of his book in Italian dedicated to the Papacy, *Il Papa Ministero e missione* (in English has been already published in November 2021, *The Pope: His Mission and His Task*) which offers his theological point of view on the mission of the Successor of Peter. Inevitably, the conversation ended on the current situation of the Church.

Your Eminence, why did you describe Pius XI's words condemning the development of national Churches as "truly prophetic words, which retain their meaning even in today's confrontation with media-driven totalitarian claims"?
The national Church is a perfect contradiction against God's will to save all mankind and unify them all in the Holy Spirit. One cannot reduce the faith to a single nation as the Orthodox do with autocephaly. This is a non-Catholic principle. We are the Catholic Church, that is, universal, for all peoples.

Thoughts inevitably go to what is happening in 'your' Germany. Are you afraid that the results of the German Synodal Way may infect the next Synod on Synodality?
Of course. Promoters and supporters of the German Synodal Way do not want to separate themselves from the Catholic Church, but on the contrary they want to become its locomotive. Their agenda has been known for over half a century and is still that of the ZDK (Central Committee of German Catholics, *ed*). They are not the true representation of the German laity, but rather officials who for decades have been fighting against priestly celibacy, against the indissolubility of marriage, and in favour of the ordination of women.

These proposals were presented during the synodal process as the solution to the problem of child abuse committed by clerics. Didn't the admission of guilt and the resignation for the mishandling of cases by German bishops leading the Way undermine the credibility of this narrative?
The truth is that in Germany there has been a great instrumentalisation of these sad events committed by some priests in order to introduce an agenda that existed before and that has nothing to do with this tragedy. But on the other hand, the mainstream media in Germany do nothing but extol the changes in doctrine promoted by the Synodal Way. For them, only the Frankfurt assembly is good in the Church, while

everything else is vilified and the labels of conservative or even fascist are used! The majority of the German press is in favour of the Synodal Way not to improve the Church, but to destroy it. It is no coincidence that they talk about cases of paedophilia committed by priests while remaining silent about those committed in sport, universities, or politics where the percentage of crimes is even higher. Those who have always been against priestly celibacy and against the Church's sexual morality have now found in the tragedy of child abuse committed by priests a means to destroy what they have always wanted to destroy.

Still on the subject of the German Synodal Way, have you heard the intervention of the bishop of Antwerp, Monsignor Johan Bonny, who supported the cause of blessings for homosexual couples by claiming the scheme that the Belgian Bishops' Conference brought to Rome? According to the prelate, purported Roman authorities told the bishops that it was their decision and even the Pope told him "it's your decision, I can understand that".
Today those with heterodox positions try to legitimise themselves by making references to alleged statements or interviews by Francis. But in this way they exceed their competence. In history there have been many heretical bishops. This pro-rainbow blessing scheme is a clear heresy. To legitimise it they cannot refer to a time when the Pope allegedly said something to them. Even if the Pope had indeed said it, they can never introduce the blessing of same-sex couples as if it were a marriage. It is absolutely impossible. It is not within the competence of any Pope to change Revelation and the basis of Christian and Catholic morality. Least of all can an episcopal conference do so. These are acts against the Church.

Do you think the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith should intervene to rebuke the Bishop of Antwerp?
Yes, it must intervene.

If you were still the Prefect would you have intervened?
Perhaps they no longer wanted me as prefect precisely because I would have intervened. (Laughs, *ed*.).
This is the duty of the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. One cannot only reason with a political or diplomatic logic. The time has come to confess the truth.

In the book you wrote about the Second Vatican Council that "there can only be a hermeneutics of reform and continuity". A few days ago, to justify the restrictions on the liberalisation of the so-called Tridentine Mass, Cardinal Arthur Roche said that "the theology of the Church has changed". How do you

judge these words?

As a theologian, I am not happy with this statement by Cardinal Roche. The faith is always the same. We cannot change the faith. Theology is developing, but always on the basis of the same faith. The Second Vatican Council did not change the faith concerning the sacrament of the Eucharist.

The Eucharist is the sacramental representation of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the real presence of Jesus Christ. Only the liturgical forms have developed through this good idea of the active participation of all the faithful. The external form of the liturgy has developed, but there are no substantial changes. I believe that one would have to express this with a deep understanding of the theology of the development of the Mass and the liturgy. The great Councils on the Eucharist - the Council of Trent and Vatican II - teach that there has never been only one rite in the Catholic Church.

So you do not consider the so-called Tridentine Mass to be a threat to the unity of the Church?

No, as such no. There are some who say that this is the only orthodox form and that the form developed after Vatican Council II is invalid. These are extremists. But one should not react to punish a few extremists in an extremist manner, punishing the vast majority of these communities who love the Church, the Pope, and the teachings of the Second Vatican Council. Extremists are there on both sides: on the other, there are those who say that orthodoxy only depends on the rite. So Greek Catholics do not have a true Mass? This is absurd. These public statements are made without deep reflection.

Would you advise the Holy Father to withdraw the restrictions in the *rescriptum ex audientia* signed by Cardinal Roche?

It would be better to apply the line of Benedict XVI, the greatest connoisseur of the liturgy and also the greatest theologian. The Church's highest authority must always seek reconciliation. A dialectic is needed, finding a way to peace. The Church is in Christ the symbol of the unity of mankind. And I add one more thing.

Go ahead.

These communities associated with the so-called Latin Mass suffer from the prejudice that would have them as enemies of the Second Vatican Council. But there are bishops in Germany who openly deny Vatican II! They question it or say that it only represents a stage in the past. They do not accept the doctrine of the Council.

What is Rome's reaction to this? Why is there a reaction with all authority against one side, while against the other side - which, for example, promotes the blessings of homosexual couples - there is practically no reaction?

In 2022 the long-awaited reform of the Roman Curia that held sway in the pre-Conclave congregations of 2013 saw the light of day. In the book you write that "when one waits for a plan from experts in politics, finance, and economics to reform it, one misses the mark". So you disagree with the novelty of the *Praedicate Evangelium* that will also allow lay people to become dicastery heads?

If one considers the dicastery as almost a civil institution of the Vatican, the layman can be a minister. But the Roman Curia is different from the Vatican City State. It is an ecclesiastical institution. Now congregations are called 'dicasteries' to avoid using an ecclesiological term. I am against the secularisation of the Roman Curia. The head of the communications dicastery can be a competent layman. But a clear distinction must be made between the institutions of Vatican City, which is a state and cannot govern the Church. The Vatican has nothing to do with the Church.

To make it clear: a layman could be governor of the Vatican City State while he could not lead the former Holy Office?

Exactly. The basis of the Roman Curia is the College of Cardinals. There is a Roman Curia that serves the Pope in his service to the universal Church. I think that those who drafted these innovations did not reflect on all this. They have dwelt on the financial scandals but not thought enough about what the Roman Curia really is on a theological level. Vatican II speaks of the Roman Curia but as an ecclesiological body: what touches the Church is the task of our congregations and of the Pope as Pope, not as head of state.