Cardinal warns of ‘poison’ of adapting the Church to the spirit of the age

PHOENIX, Arizona, January 1, 2020 –

Speaking to a large gathering of U.S. college students, Cardinal Gerhard Müller warned against attempts to adapt the faith to “the spirit of the age” and giving in to “relativism” and “modernization.”

The former Prefect for the Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith did not mince words in his Jan. 1 homily (**See Full Text Below**) on the Solemnity of Mary Mother of God which was delivered to thousands of Catholics gathered in Phoenix for the 2020 Student Leadership

Summit. Over the course of the four day gathering in Phoenix now in progress, 9,000 Catholic young people — mostly college students — are expected to attend workshops and keynote speeches about missionary discipleship.

The Cardinal repeatedly cautioned the students against “adapting” the Church to the secular world.

“We cannot escape the deadly poison of the rattlesnake or other serpents if we strike friendship with it, but only if we prudently keep our distance and have the antidote ready at hand. The poison paralyzing the Church is the opinion that we should adapt to the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, and not the Spirit of God; That we should relativize God’s commandments, and reinterpret the doctrine of faith,” declared Müller. “Instead, as St Paul says, ‘The Church of the living God’ is ‘the pillar and foundation of truth.’”

“The crisis in the Church is man-made and has arisen because we have cozily adapted ourselves to the spirit of a life without God,” he said. “This is why in our hearts so many things still are un-redeemed and, consequently, long for substitute gratification!”

“Should the Church adapt the revelation of God in Jesus Christ to ‘where people are today?’ Can the Church be faithful to her foundation, and to her founder, if she mutates into a religion of humanity?” he asked. “The allegedly peaceful agnostics of today generously allow the simple people to keep their religion, but only because they are eager to use the potential of meaning the Church possesses for their own purposes: They do not hold revealed faith to be true, but they would like to use it for building the new religion of world-unity.”

Müller alerted his listeners to the fact that even a “few Church leaders” are confused in relation to attempts to “reconstruct the Church as a convenient civil religion, and make her more worldly, more secular.”

“Many believe what the Church needs is ‘modernization;’ Conversely, anyone opposing modernization is fought like an enemy and called ‘traditionalist,’” said Müller.

He continued:

Let me give you an example of how this works: Protecting human life from conception to natural death is discredited as a “conservative, right-wing” political position – while at the same time killing innocent unborn children is declared a “human right,” and therefore deemed “progressive.” In politics and media, it is all about power over human minds and over the money in people’s pockets. For this purpose, people are being conditioned by using campaign slogans like “conservative” or “modern.”

But faith in God is concerned with the contrast between true and false, and about the distinction between good and evil. What matters most deeply is that the faith is true, because Christ is the Truth. Only truth gives life, even and especially when it is challenging.

“There is no religion which is somehow ‘higher’ than the Church’s faith in Jesus Christ,” declared Cardinal Müller in no uncertain terms. “Jesus cannot be surpassed by the changing of times because God’s eternity encompasses all eras of history and the biography of each person.”

“God ‘wills everyone to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself,’” said Müller, quoting St. Paul’s letter to Timothy.

Jesus Christ “alone can and does save the world; and frankly, I also would not want to be saved by anyone but him, true God and true man,” he concluded.

From LIFESITE

FULL TEXT

Homily of H.E. Cardinal G.L. Müller

Dear Brothers and Sisters in “Jesus the Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).

As we celebrate the first day of 2020, we wish one another a “Happy New Year.”

Because God “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens,” (Ephesians 1:3). As Christians we look at this wish within the deeper context of being God’s beloved sons and daughters.

As Catholics we connect our good will towards all with the marvelous experience that, in the light of God, all things – past, present, and future – have a purpose. When the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the world becomes present in the Holy Mass, we give “thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,” (Ephesians 5:20). We thank God for having created the world, and for giving us all we need. We thank Him, that for our sake Christ became man, and for sending us His Holy Spirit. We thank Him for the Holy Church, who has become our Mother in faith: She is the Body of Christ, in which we have been incorporated through baptism and confession of the catholic faith. We thank Him for our families, in which we were allowed to grow up, and for our friends, who are our faithful companions through life. Making such friends is one of the blessings of being part of FOCUS. And if God has called us to marriage, we thank him for our husband or wife, and for the children we love, because they are God’s gift to their parents.

As Christians, we have a musical awareness of life: In our hearts resounds the song of thanksgiving of the redeemed. Its melody is love, and its harmony is joy in God. We do not believe in the superficial optimism of fate, which we hope will remain kind to us. No one will be spared the suffering of this world, and everyone has to bear his or her cross. Instead, in work and leisure, in happiness and pain, in life and death, a Christian puts all his hope in Christ alone for “We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose,” (Romans 8:28). Like water bursting from a source, becoming a living stream that can make the desert blossom (even here in Arizona!), so our joy in God is the seed on the field of our life that brings fruit, a hundredfold. Adoration of God in the spirit of Christ is this: “To offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship,” (Romans 12:1). Following Christ’s example, who gave his life on the altar of the cross, our life is a sacrifice to God. But the same Christ, through his resurrection, has also opened the door to eternal life for us. This is our faith.

Today, however, many Christians are anxious and concerned: Looking at the state of traditionally Christian societies in the West, and at the scandals in the Church, does Christianity still fit into our time? Does the faith have a future?

The crisis in the Church is man-made and has arisen because we have cozily adapted ourselves to the spirit of a life without God. This is why in our hearts so many things still are un-redeemed and, consequently, long for substitute gratification! Consumerism really is a virus that attacks the life of faith, as Pope Francis recently said; and there are other such viruses.

But the one who believes, needs no ideology. The one who hopes, will not reach for drugs. The one who loves, is not after the lust of this world, which will pass away – along with the world.

The one who loves God and neighbor, finds happiness in the sacrifice of self-giving. We will be happy and free, when in the spirit of love we embrace the form of life to which God has called each one of us personally: in the sacrament of marriage, in celibate priesthood, or in religious life according to the three evangelical counsels of poverty, obedience and chastity for the sake of the kingdom of heaven.

I would like to evoke a Christmas homily which pope St Leo the Great preached over fifteen hundred years ago. In the midst of migration of peoples and dissolution of order, as the Roman empire was falling apart, Leo speaks to the personal faith of each Catholic. With his words, I would like to address every catholic today who has become unsettled in the present crisis of the Church:

Christian, acknowledge your dignity, and becoming a partner in the Divine nature, refuse to return to the old baseness by degenerate conduct. Remember the Head and the Body of which you are a member. Recollect that you were rescued from the power of darkness and brought out into God's light and kingdom. By the mystery of Baptism you were made the temple of the Holy Spirit: do not put such a great guest to flight from you by base acts (Sermon 21,3).

We cannot escape the deadly poison of the rattlesnake or other serpents, if we strike friendship with it, but only if we prudently keep our distance and have the antidote ready at hand. The poison paralyzing the Church is the opinion that we should adapt to the Zeitgeist, the spirit of the age, and not the Spirit of God; That we should relativize God’s commandments, and reinterpret the doctrine of faith. Instead, as St Paul says, “The Church of the living God” is “the pillar and foundation of truth,” (1 Timothy 3:15).

Yet, some people today would like to reconstruct the Church as a convenient civil religion, and make her more worldly, more secular. Many voices and opinion makers in the post-Christian society approve of such self-secularization. But that in no way means they accept the faith in Jesus Christ, never mind that even a few church leaders are confused about this. People trying to instrumentalize the faith and the Church for their political agendas are not coming closer to the faith, a faith which they are in fact abusing. We can get closer to the faith in Christ only if, together with Peter, we are looking to Jesus and confess: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” (Matthew 16:18).

The antidote against worldliness and secularization of the Church is the “truth of the Gospel,” (Galatians 2:14), and starts with living “by faith in the Son of God who has loved me and given

himself up for me," (Galatians 2:20). This is the basis for any real evangelization, and for restoring the church.

Today, however, many believe what the Church needs is "modernization"; conversely, anyone opposing modernization is fought like an enemy and called "traditionalist." Let me give you an example of how this works: Protecting human life from conception to natural death is discredited as a "conservative, right-wing" political position – while at the same time killing innocent unborn children is declared a "human right," and therefore deemed "progressive." In politics and media, it is all about power over human minds and over the money in people's pockets. For this purpose, people are being conditioned by using campaign slogans like "conservative" or "modern." But faith in God is concerned with the contrast between true and false, and about the distinction between good and evil. What matters most deeply is that the faith is true, because Christ is the Truth. Only truth gives life, even and especially when it is challenging.

For some, however, the Church is lagging behind by 200 years, compared to where the world is today. Is there any truth to this accusation? An accusation opinionated atheists gleefully repeat in their Schadenfreude! And allegedly progressive Catholics, on their part, play the model students of the Enlightenment, promising they will quickly catch up to the lessons of atheistic criticism of religion.

Should the Church adapt the revelation of God in Jesus Christ to "where people are today"? Can the Church be faithful to her foundation, and to her founder, if she mutates into a religion of humanity? The allegedly peaceful agnostics of today generously allow the simple people to keep their religion, but only because they are eager to use the potential of meaning the Church possesses for their own purposes: They do not hold revealed faith to be true, but they would like to use it for building the new religion of world-unity.

In order to be admitted to this meta-religion, the only price the Church would have to pay is giving up her truth claim. No big deal, it seems, as the relativism dominant in our world anyway rejects the idea that we could actually know the truth, and presents itself as guarantor of peace between all world-views. And in fact: a Catholicism without dogmas, without sacraments, without sacred tradition, and without doctrine, is the Fata Morgana for which even a number of people in the Church are longing.

But there is no such meta-religion because there is no religion which is somehow "higher" than the Church's faith in Jesus Christ. Instead, every time is immediate to God because it was "in

the fullness of time" that "God sent his Son, born of a woman" (Galatians 4:4), whom the shepherds of Bethlehem found as "the infant lying in the manger," (Luke 2:16). In other words: We can enter into an immediate, personal relationship to God because Christ is real and present to me. Jesus cannot be surpassed by the changing of times because God's eternity encompasses all eras of history and the biography of each person. God "wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth. For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human" (1Timothy 2:4f). In the concrete human being Jesus of Nazareth, God's universal truth is concretely present here and now – in historical time and space. Jesus Christ is not the representation of some supra-temporal truth: He is "the way, the truth and the life," in person (John 14:56).

The Church walks with the times in their societal changes, similar to how she walks with us as we get older and celebrate our birthdays one after the other! And theology, in dialogue with modern, scientific and technological worldviews, illustrates how faith and reason are compatible. Faith is knowledge of God's truth. In the light of faith, we understand ourselves and the world in its innermost origin and purpose. This knowledge, however, we owe to the Word of God who "became flesh and dwelt among us," (John 1:14). By inner-worldly reasoning, the truth of revealed faith can neither be proven nor disproven. The Church knows that we are lost without the Gospel of Christ. The Blessed Virgin Mary conceives in her womb, and gives birth to, the "one Lord Jesus Christ", the "Light from Light," the one Savior of the whole world. He alone can and does save the world; and frankly, I also would not want to be saved by anyone but him, true God and true man.

Let us pray therefore today, as we celebrate the Mother of God: Merciful Lord, may the Mother of Mercies intercede for us, also in the new year, because through her "we were found worthy to receive the author of life, our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.". Amen.