

INTERVIEW

Müller: A Consistory to proclaim peace comes from God

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“War is the offspring of original sin: it is against the will of God. And it is not only in Europe, but on every continent. For this reason, it would be reasonable to convene a Consistory to face the challenges to world peace, with traditionally Christian weapons:

prayer and the proclamation of the Gospel of Peace". This is what Cardinal Gerhard Ludwig Müller, Prefect Emeritus of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, affirmed during his recent interview with the *Daily Compass*, as he reflected upon questions raised by the present war in Ukraine.

Your Eminence, Europe has once again become a theater of war. At this point, more than two months have passed, and there is a realistic risk of dramatic escalation. How should we judge the events which are occurring in Ukraine?

War is not only in Ukraine: it is on every continent, as it is the sign of the state of original sin in which humanity finds itself. War is always against the will of God, because the nature of His will is to save; God desires peace amongst people, but without the sanctifying grace of Salvation, humanity is incapable of overcoming its state of concupiscence, which creates conflict within itself. We know, by reading the Bible, that the first consequence of original sin was the episode of Cain and Abel, a fratricide. Through Adam, from the perspective of human nature, we all are brothers and sisters; how much more, we who have received the grace of Christ! On an even deeper level, we have become the brothers and sisters of Christ Himself. For this reason, it is shocking to observe an individual such as Putin, who claims to be a Christian, who participated last week in the Orthodox Easter Vigil at the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow, commencing such an aggression. When I was in Southern Poland three weeks ago visiting Ukrainian refugees, (10 km from the Ukrainian border), a journalist asked me if Putin could be compared to Hitler or Stalin: I responded that in a sense He is actually worse, because the two dictators were atheists, whereas Putin declares himself to be Christian. How can he possibly kiss the Icons of Christ, Maria and the Saints, and at the same time order the killing of the living image of God; his very own Christian brothers and sisters, as the majority of Ukrainians are Christian.

It is particularly shocking, considering that the respective populations of Russia and Ukraine are Christian, and that the respective National Orthodox Churches are directly implicated in the conflict.

For Catholics it would be unthinkable to make Christianity an instrument of nationalism. We respect the concept of nation as a positive reality, but we are absolutely against every form of nationalism, which signifies the deification of one's own nation: this is paganism. The nation is part of our human existence, as is the family, the city, our languages and our respective cultures: they are all positive values which, however, must not be deified. These are all ways to come closer to God. Jesus gave His life for Mankind; the universality of the Catholic Faith must assist us in overcoming all of these "isms" which are ideologies – a word sharing a common root with the word *idol*. This is the

problem with the Orthodox Church: in substance, they profess the same Catholic faith as we, but they have lost this universal orientation. Instead of orienting themselves towards the figure of the successor of Peter – the Pope – their need for a principle of unity is transferred to the Nation. This is a falsehood. It is against the Christian Faith: Jesus gave His life for all Mankind: Russians, Ukrainians, Americans, Italians, etc. included, and not for the concept of nation.

This seems to be the destiny of all Christian denominations which separate from Rome (Protestant, Anglican, Orthodox), to identify with their respective nations. And yet at the present moment, there are those individuals within the Catholic Church who are pushing the Orthodox Synodal model, which is a sort of Federation of National Churches, as the German Synodal Way demonstrates.

Catholics in Germany have always been a persecuted minority, from the time of Prussia, to Bismarck, to Hitler: we have always been considered second class citizens, because we have preserved this link with Peter, and for this reason they have accused us of being *ultramontists*. Now, unfortunately, the Church in Germany seems to be succumbing to the temptation of nationalism, and to a separation from the Catholic Church. But this has nothing to do with synodality, which for us is an aspect of Catholicism. It has nothing to do with the democratization of the Church. The Church is not a State: The Church is the Body of Christ and the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is inconceivable for us to observe the Holy Synod of the Russian Church speaking of a just war, a Holy War: what is going on? In our Christian tradition, a war is considered just in as much as it is necessary to defend one's nation from an aggressor, but not to sanctify the notion of war as an acceptable political instrument *per se*.

Today, the Western World is divided between those who support the necessity of sending arms to Ukraine, and those who are contrary, demanding an immediate series of negotiations. Where is the point of equilibrium between the necessity to assist a population in defending itself, and the risk of an escalation with unexpected consequences?

The problem is that even a just war depends upon certain ambivalent, ambiguous realities. As an emergency for defending one's nation, it is justified, but it is not an acceptable means in the light of human nature and the Grace and Love of God towards all. Even those defending themselves must kill others, and this cannot be part of God's project for humanity. For this reason, the situation is an extremely delicate one. For this reason, on the question of sending arms, politicians must be extremely cautious, observing the situation, deciding what is best in order to avoid an escalation, while avoiding the possibility of Putin threatening other countries.

There are those who claim - the US and the UK first and foremost - that it will be necessary to maintain the conflict for as long as possible in order to weaken and punish Putin. In this manner, however, Ukrainian citizens will pay a very high price. Is this a morally sustainable position?

Herein lies the ambiguity of this situation. It is one thing to speak of the Ukrainian people's right to self-defense, but it is quite another to speak of the vested interests of the Americans in particular in this direct confrontation with Russia, because it is obvious that questions regarding the management and balance of world power are involved. It is difficult to sustain any particular moral superiority of a country such as the US, when it - like many other countries - promotes abortion and gender ideology. The assistance provided to Ukrainians does not always have pure motives: just motives often mix with a nation's particular political interests. We must be realistic: these leaders respect moral principals only when it is convenient to them. But for us, moral law is superior to all political interests.

This argument obviously extends to the European Union. It seems we have fallen back into the Cold War mentality, which placed Russia in direct opposition to the Western World. Saint John Paul II insisted, however, on the concept of Europe as extending from the Atlantic to the Urals, and therefore a Europe which included Russia. What do you think?

We cannot reduce the West to a mere political concept. We speak of the West and the East with the categories of Christian Culture. Russia clearly is part of Christian Culture, as it has a profound Christian Culture. Russian Christians suffered greatly under

Communism, losing tens of thousands of religious men and women, with countless millions of Christian laity losing their lives in the various gulags: they gave great testimony to the Christian faith. Therefore, we must absolutely distinguish between a people – both Russians and Ukrainians – and this regime under which they suffered. And now it is necessary to distinguish between the people and the phenomenon of “Putinism”, or ultranationalism. We, as the Catholic Church, feel united to the Orthodox Church: notwithstanding the criticism of the Patriarch of Moscow for his role in this war, at a theological, dogmatic and sacramental level, we are very close, united with the Russians. The Catholic Church must operate on a different level, avoiding the possibility of being manipulated by the politics of Brussels. We cannot criticize the ultranationalism of the Russian Church on one hand, and then accept the ideology and the politics of the European Union. The interests of the EU are anti-Christian. They promote a false, anti-Christian anthropology. Even in Europe, real Catholics are persecuted by means of social exclusion, because they refuse the ideologies promoting abortion and gender theory, as they are anti-life. We must remind our European politicians of this: moral principals are superior to their political and ideological interests. It is one thing to criticize Putin for his military politics, but we cannot accept that they criticize Putin in the name of ‘Western Values’, because he does not permit gay ‘marriages’. These are not values.

With regards to the ambiguity of Brussels: they exalt Ukrainian nationalism, then they attack members of the EU such as Poland and Hungary for defending their national identity.

It is full of contradictions. Brussels criticizes Hungary for having elected Orban, whom they detest, and then applaud the French who voted for Macron. This means that they do not judge with objectiveness, but rather according to their own interests. The Poles have taken in three million Ukrainian refugees, but the EU is actually blocking European funding to Poland. And at the same time, they have given three billion Euro to Erdogan. They criticize the democratically elected Polish government, accusing it of behaving unconstitutionally, and then they pay a dictator. They forget their own (supposed) principles, for there is too much ideology in Brussels. They desire to impose their ideology, they do not respect the principles of democracy, in which a people may choose by whom to be governed. It has also happened in Italy. They have globalism in mind: a single world government. But who can legitimize this single government? A single government is no guarantee of peace, on the contrary. It is through God that we shall have peace, not through any world government. These individuals have only economic and political interests in mind, and with such interests, the world will never be at peace.

What can the Church do to promote peace?

As I mentioned previously, this is above all a spiritual battle, and for this reason our weapons should be prayers for peace and the proclamation of the Gospel of Peace. It would be worthwhile to organize a Consistory to discuss these challenges of world peace with the Pope; that is, praying and stimulating faithful Catholics to enter into this spiritual battle, which is the battle of God against the evil of the world. We must speak according to the criteria of faith and morals. We bishops are not politicians. We mustn't speak of weapons, but of spiritual battle: the shield of Faith and the sword of the Word of God, as Saint Paul says (cfr. Ef 6, 13-16). With love and with assistance towards our neighbour, we may demonstrate to our politicians that there are higher values than theirs, that every person is made in the Image of God, and that this must be the principle of all politics.