

## Cardinal Gerhard Müller Calls COVID-Related Sacrament Restrictions ‘Grave Sin’

In an interview with the Register, the German cardinal also warned against bishops and priests who ‘offer themselves as courtiers to the rulers of this world and make themselves their propagandists.’



Cardinal Gerhard Müller. (photo: Edward Pentin)

Some politicians, mainstream media and Big Tech have “ruthlessly exploited” COVID-19 to promote “totalitarian thinking” that has even led to division within families, **Cardinal Gerhard Müller** has observed.

In a Dec. 1 email interview with the Register, the prefect emeritus of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also said that the response of some bishops and priests to close churches or deny the sacraments is a “grave sin” that goes against their “God-given authority.”

A small minority of dioceses in Germany have been restricting Masses to the vaccinated or those recently recovered from the virus. Such a decision, as well as closure of some churches, was “shocking proof of how far the secularization and de-Christianization of thought has already reached the shepherds of Christ’s flock,” the German cardinal said.

The Catholic Church and governments, he added, must “work towards social cohesion” and avoid divisive rhetoric that labels some as “conspiracy theorists” or “sinners against charity.” He also said bishops and priests “must not offer themselves as courtiers to the rulers of this world and make themselves their propagandists.”

The cardinal’s comments come as various nations in Europe, along with Australia, impose strict vaccine mandates on their citizens, with the Austrian government planning to fine those who are unvaccinated \$4,000 starting in February and may raise the amount to nearly \$10,000. Authorities in Greece are already imposing monthly fines of 100 euros on people over 60 years-old until they take the vaccine. In the U.S. this week, judges blocked attempts by the Biden administration to enforce vaccines on American workers. The cardinal’s answers have been edited for style.

*Your Eminence, what is your reaction to these increasingly severe mandates, particularly in Europe and Australia?*

Only in extreme emergencies can a legitimate state authority impose a general vaccination requirement on citizens.

In such cases, 1) The common good must be the determining factor, which, under certain circumstances, can restrict, if not abolish, the freedom of the individual. 2) The production of the vaccine must be ethically sound, and 3) The medical, psychological, social consequences and side effects must be measurable and remain proportionate to the expected benefits.

Unfortunately, many governments have lost the public’s trust through chaotic measures that have a contradictory logic.

In quite a few cases, regulations have been compromised and contaminated by the financial and political interests of ideological lobbies and pharmaceutical giants. Instead of uniting society in the fight against the pandemic, the powers that be in politics, the mainstream media and Big Tech have ruthlessly exploited the situation to promote the agenda of the “Great Reset,” i.e., totalitarian thinking. Right down to families, people are

at loggerheads with each other.

But in a crisis, Church and state leaders must work toward cohesion and avoid discriminating against dissenters by calling them “conspiracy theorists,” “sinners against charity.” Otherwise, they are guilty of the very divisive misconduct of which they publicly accuse others.

*Why do you think the Vatican and bishops almost without exception have tended to be publicly silent about these discriminatory and, some would say, totalitarian policies, especially when the vaccines’ efficacy in preventing transmission remains debatable (the number of COVID cases is rising in Austria, Germany and other countries despite widespread vaccination) and when the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ruled against mandatory vaccination in December 2020?*

Bishops and priests are ministers of reconciliation of people with God (2 Corinthians 5:19) and of reconciliation of people with one another (*Lumen Gentium* 1; 21; 28). Their mission and authority come from Jesus Christ, and they are made effective in the Holy Spirit.

Servants of Christ in the apostolic ministry must not offer themselves as courtiers to the rulers of this world and make themselves their propagandists. According to our Catholic faith, the pope, besides being the first witness of the supernatural revelation of God in Jesus Christ, is also the supreme guardian of the natural moral law. The Church’s magisterium is therefore entitled and obliged to point out the limits of temporal power, which ends at the freedom of faith and conscience.

*What are your views on some dioceses, such as Berlin, which is implementing a 2G rule — that is, restricting the Mass only to the vaccinated or those recently recovered from COVID?*

It is, above all, contrary to divine law if access to the means of grace of the Church, i.e., the sacraments of Christ, are impaired or even forbidden by the state authorities. That even bishops have closed their churches or denied sacraments to persons seeking help is a grave sin against their God-given authority. This is shocking proof of how far the secularization and de-Christianization of thought has already reached the shepherds of Christ’s flock.

In this situation, we bishops should remember the example of St. Charles Borromeo and,

above all, be guided by the word of Jesus: “I am the Good Shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (John 10:11).

For the hirelings, like lords of the manor, dispose of the grace of God as they see fit. The bishops, however, as successors of the apostles, are not rulers according to the ways of the world, but ministers of the Word and ministers of the grace of Christ. Somewhat different is the observance of the reasonable rules to prevent the transmission of the disease. But this cannot be used to justify the refusal of the sacraments on principle.

For the grace of eternal life must take precedence over temporal goods.

*How do you think the Church should be responding; what should her leaders be saying?*

In times of crisis, places of worship and people’s hearts must be wide open so that people may seek refuge in God, from whom all help comes. All vaccines have a limited temporal effect. No medicine or technical invention can save us from temporal and eternal death. The Bread that Jesus gives is the cure for eternal death and — without an expiration date — the food for eternal life. “Whoever eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:51). And that is why, at the beginning of the second century, the martyr-bishop Ignatius of Antioch, in his “Letter to the Church of Ephesus” (20:2), was able to call the Eucharist the “medicine of immortality.”

The task of bishops is to administer the Eucharist to the faithful, not to keep them away from it. Personal devotion at home and virtual co-celebration on screens cannot replace real and physical presence in the assembly of the faithful, for we are bodily and social beings. Therefore, the grace and truth of God is communicated to us through the Incarnation of his Son and is shared with us in the community of the Church. It is his Body. In the Eucharist, Christ is hidden but really present with his divinity and his humanity — in flesh and blood.

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