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Just before death, Martini: 'Church 200 years out of date'

Thomas C. Fox | Sep. 2, 2012

CNS photo

The Church is "200 years out of date" and in need of a "radical transformation," Italian Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini said in an interview two weeks before his death.

The progressive cardinal died Aug. 31 [1] at the age of 85.

His remarks appeared Saturday in the Italian news daily, *Corriere della Sera*, and have been published [2] in English by various international news services.

"The church is tired," Martini said in the interview. Catholics lack confidence in the church, he said.

"Our culture has grown old, our churches are big and empty and the church bureaucracy rises up, our religious rites and the vestments we wear are pompous."

He singled out church teaching on marriage and divorce as an important issued the church must face.

"Unless the church adopts a more generous attitude towards divorced persons, it will lose the allegiance of future generations," the cardinal added. The question, he said, is not whether divorced couples can receive Holy Communion, but how the church can help complex family situations.

"A woman is abandoned by her husband and finds a new companion to look after her and her children. A second love succeeds. If this family is discriminated against, not just the mother will be cut off but also her children." In this way "the church loses the future generation", Martini said.

"The child sex scandals oblige us to undertake a journey of transformation," Martini said, referring to the child sex abuse that has plagued the church for several decades.

The advice he leaves behind to attack what he called "the tiredness of the church," is a "radical transformation, beginning with the Pope and his bishops".

Pope Benedict XVI met privately with the cardinal during a visit to Milan in June, and was informed of his ailing health Thursday, the Vatican press office said, according to Catholic News Service.

The cardinal was a prolific author whose books were best-sellers in Italy and included everything from scholarly biblical exegesis to poetry and prayer guides.

He retired as archbishop of Milan in 2002, where he was known as a strong pastor and administrator, and as a very careful, thoughtful advocate of wider discussion and dialogue on some delicate and controversial church positions.

At various times, he expressed openness to the possibility of allowing married Latin-rite priests under certain circumstances, ordaining women as deacons and allowing Communion for some divorced Catholics in subsequent marriages not approved by the church.

During a special Synod of Bishops for Europe in 1999, he made waves when he proposed a new church wide council or assembly to unravel "doctrinal and disciplinary knots" such as the shortage of priests, the role of women, the role of laity and the discipline of marriage.

His carefully worded remarks at the time reflected his belief that the church would benefit from a wider exercise of collegiality, or the shared responsibility of bishops for the governance of the church. The idea of a new council was not taken up formally by the synod.

Martini was much loved and thousands paid their respects at his coffin in Milan cathedral on Saturday.

Catholic News Service also contributed to this report.

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