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Key cardinal: Pope asking church to 'walk together'

Joshua J. McElwee | Sep. 26, 2013 The Francis Chronicles

Pope Francis is asking the Catholic church's bishops and faithful to "walk together" in order to face the issues of the day, one of the eight cardinals appointed by the pope to oversee expected Vatican reform has said.

Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, the archbishop of the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa, made his comments Wednesday in an interview with the Canadian Catholic media outlet Salt + Light.

Maradiaga, who will be meeting in Rome Oct. 1-3 with seven other cardinals appointed by the pope to oversee reform of the Vatican's central bureaucracy, has been in Canada this week, speaking at the yearly assembly of the Canadian bishops' conference.

Also the president of the international confederation of Catholic relief agencies, known as Caritas Internationalis, Maradiaga gave a public address to the Canadian bishops Tuesday before meeting with them in a closed session Wednesday.

Both Maradiaga's public remarks to the Canadians and his later interview with Salt + Light may offer a small way into the cardinal's thinking as he heads to the Rome meeting.

Speaking to the Canadian bishops, Maradiaga focused largely on retired Pope Benedict XVI's writings on justice and peace issues, saying the former pontiff's encyclical letters put "charity at the heart of the mission of the Church."

"Our social concern for justice, the promotion of human development, is obviously not the whole and sole task of the Church, but it is "an essential" part of it," Maradiaga said to the Canadians, according to a copy of his remarks made available online by Caritas [1].

"Today we're living though a time of grave crisis," Maradiaga continued. "It's not just an economic crisis, nor is it only a cultural crisis; nor is it a crisis of faith. Today, humankind is in danger. Today, the body of Christ is in danger."

Quoting Pope Benedict, Maradiaga says Catholicism must "present its faith in a new and vital way and to re-proclaim it as a force for unity, a force of solidarity and of eternity's openness to time."

Speaking in the interview with Salt + Light's Sebastian Gomes, Maradiaga got a bit more specific about his role with the cardinals' group, saying there have been several reforms of the Vatican bureaucracy, known as the Roman curia, over the centuries.

Pope Francis, said Maradiaga, wants to focus also on the role of the Synod of Bishops, a meeting of a group of bishops that was set up after the Second Vatican Council (1962-5) to offer regular advice and council to the pope in his governing of the global church.

"*Synodos* [the Greek word] means, 'Walking together,'" Maradiaga told Salt + Light. "And so walking together

means collegiality is not only a matter of, 'I am in my diocese, you are in your diocese, but we are a collegium of bishops.'"

"Synodality means, 'Let's go and walk together,'" he continued. "It means that the synod will be transformed in a more agile way of the pope to consult the church and to [be] walking together, especially [with] the problems of the church."

Gomes' full interview with Maradiaga is available at Salt + Light's YouTube channel here [2]. It starts at about the 2:00 minute mark.

Following is an *NCR* transcription of most of the exchange.

Salt + Light, based in Toronto, is led by Basilian Fr. Thomas Rosica, who also assists the Vatican with English language relations with media.

***Gomes*: Cardinal, you're a part of this committee of eight that has been appointed by the pope to advise him on questions of governance and reform of the curia. What do you see as the main objective or purpose of this established committee?**

Maradiaga: It was a desire of the pre-conclave meetings that the pope needed more information from the bases, not only from the nunciatures and the secretary of state. And there was a suggestion to appoint cardinals from the five continents in order to, well, communicate with the pope more easily. And then he just appointed us in order to help him in the reformation of the curia, that was also a desire from the pre-conclave.

When it comes to questions of reform and governance, what are the kinds of things that we're talking about? Is this practical changes at the departmental levels, or is it kind of a bigger picture thing that has to do with approach, attitude -- that kind of thing?

There have been reformations of the curia in many times. The first was in the 16th century. Then we had the reformation promoted by Pius X at the beginning of the 20th century. Then, we had another one after Vatican II from Paul VI. Then, we had the actual *Pastor Bonus* that was from John Paul II in 1989.

And so there was a wish in many cardinals that it is necessary to make some changes, important changes. They will take place, but we didn't start our meeting yet. So, we have been collecting suggestions, there have been suggestions from all the five continents. And at the beginning of October, we will start.

The meeting that you referred to is going to be taking place just in a few days ... You're ending that meeting by going with Pope Francis to Assisi. What's the significance of going on that?

Well, he invited us to go, to join him, because it's a sign of collegiality as well. And, especially, because Assisi has a special significance for all the church, but specially for the pope. He chose that name. He clearly stated he did it because he admires St. Francis of Assisi and he wants a poor church for the poor.

All the things that we've been talking about come back to this question of collegiality that you mentioned. Clearly, this is something that the pope is very interested in in this particular time for the church. You've been a part of many synods ? what are you hearing from Pope Francis when it comes to synodality, collegiality in general, as the church is moving forward at this point?

Sometimes, the Eastern church used to say, 'OK, the church has not synodality, it has collegiality but not synodality.' And Benedict answered, 'We have synodality in a circular way.' But of course, it's necessary to improve it.

Synodos [the Greek word] means, 'Walking together.' And so walking together means collegiality is not only a matter of, 'I am in my diocese, you are in your diocese, but we are a collegium of bishops.'

Synodality means, 'Let's go and walk together.' It means that the synod will be transformed in a more agile way of the pope to consult the church and to [be] walking together, especially [with] the problems of the church.

You can to this plenary assembly to speak ? specifically on what the church's role is when it comes to charity, peace, justice, development. But you also emphasized in your talk the role of the faithful ? in work specifically at the parish level. Why this strong emphasis on doing this work at the grassroots level?

Because the majority of the church are the lay men and women. And many times, people think there is a problem and the church doesn't speak. The church is not the hierarchy -- we are the last part of the church.

The biggest part are the lay men and women. How can I say -- to awake the conscience that the lay men and women are very important in the church. And so, especially, in matters of justice, peace, and charity we need more participation. And many times, we reduce the lay men and women only to observers.

No, they are very important participants and it is necessary to awake this.

You're talk to the Canadian bishops was also heavily influenced by the thought and the writings of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI when it comes to charity. What do you see as Pope Benedict's legacy or lasting influence on the church's social doctrine? What was new that he brought to the conversation?

I believe that he brought to the center the role of love to the church.

Deus Caritas Est is a key document in order to bring back to the church the real image of God that has then been developed by Francis -- enhancing that love is mercy, love is kindness, love is like caressing as a mother does with the babies.

And this is the way we have to approach, in the approach of the Good Samaritan.

The legacy of Benedict is enormous. And not only *Deus Caritas Est* but *Caritas in Varitate* as well. And hope -- *Spe Salvi.* I believe that this is really a great treasure that Benedict left to the church.

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