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It's cardinal v. cardinal on divorced and remarried Catholics

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Rome — A rift has seemingly opened between two cardinals with significant Vatican influence, as the head of the pope's Council of Cardinals has suggested that the Vatican's doctrinal czar needs to be more "flexible" in his views on divorced and remarried Catholics.

Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga made the comment Monday in an interview with the German newspaper *Kölner Stadt-Anzeiger*.

Named in April as the coordinator of the pope's kitchen cabinet of eight cardinals from around the world, Rodriguez Maradiaga was asked about a recent article in which German Cardinal-designate Gerhard Müller, head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, appeared to close the door to any revision to church rules barring divorced and civilly remarried Catholics from the sacraments.

"I think I understand it," Rodriguez Maradiaga is quoted as replying.

"He's a German, one has to say, and above all he's a German theology professor, so in his mentality there's only truth and falsehood. But I say, my brother, the world isn't like this, and you should be a little flexible when you hear other voices. That means not just listening and then saying no."

Rodriguez Maradiaga said he was sure Müller "will arrive at understanding other positions too," even if at the moment "he listens only to his group of advisers."

On the question of divorced and remarried believers, Rodriguez Maradiaga seemed to signal support for some sort of change.

"The church is obliged [to uphold] the commandments of God," he said, including what Jesus said about marriage: "What God has united, let no man separate."

That said, Rodriguez Maradiaga was quoted as adding, "There are different approaches to making this clear. After the failure of a marriage, for example, we can ask if the spouses were truly united in God. There's much room for further reflection there."

However, the Honduran cardinal also seemed to caution against expectations of dramatic lurches in policy.

"We're not going in the direction that whatever is black today will be white tomorrow," he said.

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In the text of the interview, Rodriguez Maradiaga says he has not yet spoken to Müller, who will be made a cardinal by Pope Francis in a consistory scheduled for Feb. 22, about the issue of divorced and remarried Catholics.

Veteran Vatican writer Marco Tosatti described that admission as "a little surprising" in a blog posting on the interview, given the seemingly clear contrast between their two positions.

Francis has himself signaled openness to some flexibility on access to the sacraments for divorced and remarried Catholics, saying during a press conference on an airplane during his return from Brazil in July that perhaps Catholicism could learn something from the practice of Eastern Orthodox churches of recognizing a second marriage.

Francis has also announced that the issue will be on the agenda for the upcoming Synod of Bishops on the Family, to be held in the Vatican in October.

(Follow John Allen on Twitter: @JohnLAllenJr)

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