

## Rodríguez critiques papal critics, talks synod expectations

Joshua J. McElwee | Jun. 4, 2014

Washington

Those who disagree with Pope Francis' critique of the global market economy have a "reduced experience" of the world and are not in tune with the reality faced by impoverished people globally, a cardinal advisor to the pontiff has said.

Likewise, said Honduran Cardinal Óscar Rodríguez Maradiaga, many U.S. critics of the pope's economic message are especially not aware of the severe poverty faced by many in the developing world.

"Those who criticize the pope do not know the rest of the world," Rodríguez said Tuesday, speaking in an interview. "They are merely reacting to the reality of the United States, where of course there is poverty ... but the poor here are like middle class in other nations. This is the reality."

Rodríguez was speaking Tuesday in a 30-minute interview with several outlets following an event in Washington presenting Catholic views against libertarian ideologies. Archbishop of the Honduran capital of Tegucigalpa, the cardinal is also chairman of a group of eight cardinals advising Francis on reforming the Catholic church and is known to advise the pontiff regularly.

The cardinal touched on a wide range of subjects during the interview, from the upcoming October synod at the Vatican on issues of family life, to the problems facing the church in engaging young people, to the 77-year-old pontiff's health.

But Rodríguez, whose country Honduras is estimated to have some 60 percent of its population experiencing poverty, was especially focused on rebutting critics of the pope's economic message.

Asked by *NCR* about [recent remarks](#) [1] by Indianapolis Archbishop Joseph Tobin that even some U.S. bishops are saying they have a hard time understanding Francis' message, Rodríguez first responded by referencing his 24 years of service as an official with the Latin American Episcopal Conference (known as CELAM) and his past seven years as president of the Caritas Internationalis, the global confederation of Catholic relief organizations.

Those affiliations, the cardinal said, "gave me the perspective of the whole world."

"Sometimes the pastors never leave their own places and so they have a reduced experience," he continued. "For many, poverty is only ? I wouldn't say only bishops, but many persons ? numbers."

"For us, poverty is concrete people, concrete faces of people ? people who suffer, people who are living in slums, people who are in prison, people who are deported, people who are in refugee camps," said Rodríguez.

Saying he had just come back from a visit to Jordan, where he saw some of the 1 million Syrian refugees there, the cardinal continued: "That's something that maybe you will see in a movie. But that's a movie. The reality is

very different."

Libertarian ideologies, Rodríguez said, have a "limited perspective of the reality, according to particular interests."

"Libertarianism has ... an anthropology that is reduced to individualism, cutting the social dimension that is also part of the constitution of the human being," he said. "It is impoverishing humanity. Because the rest of the people are like objects I can use, but they're not really persons to relate with."

Yet, said the cardinal, libertarians "are not bad people."

"Many times they have good will," he said. "But they do not have other experiences. And so they are closed in their ideologies."

"The problem is that some times they are limited to their own experience," said Rodríguez. "To dialogue, you need to be open to look to for truth and not to defend your positions."

[Tuesday's event](#) [2] was organized by the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at The Catholic University of America, and was titled "Erroneous Autonomy: The Catholic Case Against Libertarianism."

Beyond economic theory, Rodríguez spoke at length about October's upcoming synod of bishops, to be held at the Vatican on the theme "Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization." The synod has raised hopes that Francis may be considering a change in the church's pastoral practices in a number of areas, particularly regarding the admittance of divorced and remarried persons to communion.

In that area, said Rodríguez, "of course it's necessary to make some changes."

"The doctrine is not going to change because indissolubility of marriage comes from Jesus," he continued. "It's the word of God that says what God has united men do not separate."

But, said the cardinal, a key question is whether some couples who are divorced every truly experienced the sacrament of marriage.

"This is the key," he said. "It's not a matter of giving or not giving the communion, that's another subject. It's not the most important. The main concern is: Is there a sacrament or there is not?"

Giving the example of a couple that gets married out of pressure because they are having a baby together, Rodríguez said: "We cannot talk of a sacrament there because one of the conditions of a sacrament is freedom, freedom of choice."

Rodríguez also suggested that the synod may consider some way of streamlining the process for Catholics who seek annulments of their marriages by "trying to give more possibilities to the local tribunals to take the cases of people."

In the interview Rodríguez also addressed the issue of Catholics who do not find vitality in their parishes, and therefore leave the church.

"The parish cannot be only the gas station, where I go to put gas in my tank on the weekend and that's all," he said. "No, it has to be a living community. And this is missing because some of the pastors were not trained in that. Others are too old. Nowadays, they don't dare to change."

The final note from Rodríguez? A check-in on Francis' health.

"He's doing well," the cardinal said of the pontiff.

"We have been asking him to have holidays this year," Rodríguez continued. "Because last year he didn't and sometimes he's very tired. So I think that during August he's going to retire to rest."

But can we expect Francis to take a vacation to his native Argentina?

"Not now," Rodríguez said. "Because [Argentine president Cristina Fernández de] Kirchner wants to use this for her propaganda."

[Joshua J. McElwee is *NCR* national correspondent. His email address is [jmcelwee@ncronline.org](mailto:jmcelwee@ncronline.org) [3]. Follow him on Twitter: [@joshjmac](https://twitter.com/joshjmac) [4]. He is a graduate of The Catholic University of America.]

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