



## **Pundits pick on pope for priority on poor**

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Pope Francis is speaking up for the poor and annoying the powerful.

In other words, he's doing his job.

The pope made news again last weekend when he responded to radio ranter Rush Limbaugh, who called Francis' criticism of unfettered capitalism and economic inequality "pure Marxism."

The pope said he isn't Marxist and considers the ideology wrong. Lest any capitalists take too much comfort in that, he expanded on his critique of free-market worship:

"The promise was that, when the glass was full, it would overflow, benefiting the poor. But what happens instead is that, when the glass is full, it magically gets bigger and nothing ever comes out for the poor... . I was not, I repeat, speaking from a technical point of view but according to the church's social doctrine. This does not mean being a Marxist."

What it means, I think, is being a follower of Jesus.

Jesus told us to care for the poor, not advise the poor to hang in there for a few more centuries while supply-side economics establishes heaven on Earth.

Capitalism might be the least wretched of all the economic systems in the world, but that's not something that a pope can celebrate when human suffering still abounds. The Christian tenet of loving your neighbor as yourself carries with it a note of urgency. People starve to death every day.

Francis is in a unique position to sound the alarm, and I don't see how a spiritual leader of his caliber can do anything less.

As Elizabeth Tenety, writing on the Washington Post website, put it: "He makes everyone feel a bit uncomfortable because that's what Christianity is supposed to do."

But, yes, it invites criticism.

In addition to being labeled a Marxist, Francis has been accused by a Harvard University professor of promoting envy and by an analyst for the Cato Institute of being uninformed about the economic progress that has been made during the past few decades.

If his words incite envy, I'd say that's on the envious, not the pope. And I don't think he's uninformed. I think he's pope of the whole world, including the parts where people still work for pennies a day and children still die of diseases cured a century ago in more fortunate lands.

Is a pope supposed to find that tolerable?

I'm not Roman Catholic, and I don't agree with Catholic teachings on a lot of issues. So Francis will no doubt antagonize me one of these days, too.

But, early on, I have to admire his unrestrained advocacy for the poor. He could have chosen to dwell on any number of issues in his first year.

I think he settled on the right one.