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## Cardinal Tackles Libertarian Individualism as Harmful to Solidarity

*Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga defended Pope Francis' economic criticisms of the modern economy against the assertion the state has no role in regulating markets or financial speculation.*

By Peter Jesserer Smith

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WASHINGTON — As a variety of forms of social and political libertarianism gain in popularity in the United States, Cardinal Oscar Rodríguez Maradiaga of Tegucigalpa, Honduras, appeared at an event sponsored by The Catholic University of America to present the Church's social teachings articulated by Pope Francis against radical individualism in economic, social, and political life.

Cardinal Maradiaga gave the keynote speech at the CUA-sponsored June 3 conference on Catholicism and Libertarianism, held at Bread for the World's headquarters in Washington. The event, dubbed "Erroneous Liberty: the Catholic Case Against Libertarianism," invited speakers to present the Church's social teaching against the individualist worldview in libertarianism.

He addressed the reaction against Pope Francis' critique of the modern economy — mainly from U.S. political conservatives suspicious of any criticism of the market or capitalism — with his own analysis of the Pope's social teaching in his apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel).

Cardinal Maradiaga pointed out that Pope Francis, back in 2007 as Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, expressed concern that "the poor in the dominating neo-liberal economic system were superfluous, mere waste and rubbish." And that the global economy, without social solidarity, had forced the poor from the margins of society into "social exclusion."

The cardinal pointed out that 600 million of the world's people have to live on an average annual income of 300 euros (about \$400), with many of their children going hungry, while the top 600 million have an average of 27,000 euros (about \$37,000) in disposable income. "What a discrepancy and what great injustice," he said.

And he cited an equally glaring discrepancy in access to medical care. “Meanwhile in Germany e.g. there is one doctor for 266 persons, in Liberia for example there is one for 82,000.”

He added that close to 870 million people suffer from hunger, 2 billion lack access to essential medicines, and 1 billion “do not have sufficient and clean drinking water.”

These facts, Cardinal Maradiaga, said were essential to understanding “the background of Pope Francis’ view on the situation of the poor in today’s asymmetric, distorted global economy.”

The modern economy, he said, has shown how “the rich can, unlike the poor, profit from globalization,” and asserted that even in the United States the gaps between rich and poor were larger than 100 years ago. He added that the “increasing competition on the world market” was encouraging dynamics “entailing a reduction of wages.”

### **State Guards Common Good**

He then proceeded to address Pope Francis’ concern with ideologies that demand complete autonomy for markets and speculation.

“This denies the state’s right of control, whose intrinsic task is to protect the common good,” he said.

“The libertarianism deregulation of the markets and financial market is much to the disadvantage of the poor,” he said.

Cardinal Maradiaga pointed out from his own experience as a pastor in a poor country that poverty and insecurity create “big worries for mothers and fathers that do not know how to get drinking water, food, medical care or school education for their children.”

He argued that the global economy envisioned by libertarians “excludes such people.”

“Since their point of view a human being is a consumer,” he said. “If she or he is incapable of consuming this type of economy does not need her or him, can do away with her or him.”

He repeated Pope Francis’ statement, “This economy kills,” and explained that despite the criticism leveled at the Pope, “an ‘Evangelization of joy’ cannot just light-heartedly close its eyes to reality.”

“An authentic faith is eager to change the world and participate in constructing a better world with decisive consequences for economic life,” he said. “Because then not our personal well-being is given priority, but the common good. This explains Francis’s main concerns: social integration of the poor, and peace and social dialogue.”

### **Further Insights**

Later, Cardinal Maradiaga sat down with a few news outlets to provide further insights in the conflict between the Pope and his critics on the modern economy.

Addressing the charge that the Pope's Argentinian experience distorts his view of capitalism and the market, the Latin American cardinal countered that the issue is the "reduced experience of those who criticized the Pope [who] do not know the rest of the world."

"They are only reacting to the reality of the United States, where of course there is poverty," he added. "But the poor here are middle class in other nations. This is the reality."

He pointed out that as president of Caritas Internationalis, he has traveled throughout the whole world, encountering the real experience of people in other countries, that many pastors do not have.

According to Cardinal Maradiaga, for many commentators "poverty is only numbers."

"For us, poverty is concrete: concrete people, concrete faces of people — people who are living in slums, in prisons, people who are deported or are in refugee camps."

He said the problem with libertarianism as an ideology is that it has "a limited perspective of the reality" that reduces human experience to individualism, at the expense of the natural social dimension of human beings.

"A human being cannot fulfill himself without community, family, society, friends," he said. "We cannot be totally devolved if we do not give a place to the social dimension, and individualism is the contrary."

Despite these disagreements, he emphasized that libertarians "are not bad people."

"We are not saying that — the problem is that sometimes they are limited to their own experiences."

### **Areas of Agreement**

The cardinal, however, appeared surprised to hear that some political libertarians, such as the Cato Institute, would agree with his criticisms of U.S. trade and immigration policies, particularly the subsidizing of agriculture at the expense of Central and Latin American economies.

"It is not true this is helping development, but that it is helping American interests," he said.

"Whenever you talk about free trade, I say free trade does not exist, because the powerful when they want to, put restrictions to the exportation, or they put sanctions and subsidies."