

'I'm No Marxist,' Pope Francis Tells Conservative Critics

Pope Francis, responding to conservative criticisms that his economic and social ideas smack of communism, said in an Italian newspaper interview on Sunday that he is not a Marxist but that even Marxists can be good people.

Francis also denied reports that he would name a woman cardinal, said there was good progress in cleaning up Vatican finances and confirmed that he would visit Israel and the Palestinian territories next year, La Stampa said.

Last month, American radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh, who has a huge following in the United States, railed against the pope for written comments made on the world economy.

Limbaugh, who is not Catholic, said that parts of the document were "pure Marxism coming out of the mouth of the pope" and suggested that someone else had written the papal document for him. He also accused the pope of going "beyond Catholicism" and being "purely political."

Asked about the accusations, which sparked a debate in the media and blogosphere last month, Francis, a member of the all-male Jesuit order associated with progressive social policies, said, "Marxist ideology is wrong. But in my life I have known many Marxists who are good people, so I don't feel offended."

He has also been criticized by other conservatives.

In last month's document, seen as a platform for his papacy, Francis attacked unfettered capitalism as "a new tyranny" said an "economy of exclusion and inequality" had proven to be

deadly for many people around the world.

In his response to the critics, Francis said he was not speaking “as a technician but according to the social doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, and this does not mean being Marxist.” He said he was just trying to present a “snapshot of what is happening” in the world today.

In another document last week, Francis said huge salaries and bonuses were symptoms of an economy based on greed and called again for nations to narrow the wealth gap.

Conservatives in the 1.2 billion member Church have expressed concern and disappointment about some of the pope’s pronouncements, such as when he said he was not in a position to judge homosexuals who are people of good will sincerely seeking God.

Asked about speculation that a woman could be among the new cardinals he will appoint early next year, he said: “I don’t know where that idea comes from. Women in the Church should be valued, not ‘clericalised’.”

In other parts of the interview, Francis also said a committee of eight cardinals from around the world who are advising him on changes to the Vatican structure would make its first formal recommendations to him in February but that reform would be a “lengthy task”.

He said that reform of the Vatican’s sometimes murky finances was “on the right path” and expressed satisfaction that last week a Council of Europe committee called Moneyval gave the Vatican a good evaluation of its efforts to abide by international financial standards.

He said he had not yet decided what to do about the Vatican bank, which has been touched by scandals over the decades. In the past he has not ruled out closing it.

Francis said he was “getting ready” to go to the Holy Land next year to mark the 50th anniversary of when Pope Paul VI became the first pope in modern times to visit there.

He has been invited by both Israel and the Palestinian Authority to make a visit, which is expected to take place in May or June.

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