

Pope hits capitalist zeal, asks rich to share wealth

by [Eric J. Lyman](#) in the [December 25, 2013](#) issue

Laying out a blueprint for the issues that are likely to define his papacy, Pope Francis has issued a biting critique of capitalism, calling on world leaders to fight against poverty and for the rich to share their wealth and urging the media to adjust its priorities.

“How can it be that it is not a news item when an elderly homeless person dies of exposure, but it is news when the stock market loses two points?” Francis asked in an 84-page apostolic exhortation that is widely seen as a road map for his papacy, akin to a presidential State of the Union address.

“How can we continue to stand by when food is thrown away while people are starving?” he asked. “Today, everything comes under the laws of competition and the survival of the fittest, where the powerful feed upon the powerless. As a consequence, masses of people find themselves excluded and marginalized: without possibilities, without any means of escape.”

While Francis did not address any major new topics in the document released on November 26, he expounded on some of the topics he has prioritized since becoming pope in March: poverty, inequality, justice and the role of women in the church.

His championing of some of these issues have earned him accolades from around the world, but some of the reforms he is pushing challenge entrenched powers. Some conservative parts of the church have also questioned whether he is downplaying traditional stances on sexual morality.

Francis blasted the “idolatry of money” in the world financial system, which he called “an economy of exclusion and inequality.” He also called on the church itself to work from the trenches: “I prefer a church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a church which is unhealthy from

being confined and from clinging to its own security.”

Regarding women in the church, Francis reiterated that the ordination of women was “not a question open to discussion,” but said woman should play a larger role in decision making going forward.

The pope’s inclusion of women’s ordination was significant as an attempt to tamp down expectations among liberals that, after decades of conservative dominance, Francis might revolutionize the church by ordaining women. Yet despite drawing strict boundaries, Francis nonetheless said the role of women presents the church with “profound and challenging questions which cannot be lightly evaded.”

James Martin, a fellow Jesuit and editor at large of *America* magazine, said Francis sees the church as a “joyful community of believers completely unafraid of the modern world.”

The 84-page document, *Evangelii Gaudium* ("The Joy of the Gospel"), was significant for where it pointed its criticisms: the pontiff called for action rather than faith in the benevolence of the powerful, and instead of simply urging good will toward the needy, he said there was a need for economic regulation.

“A financial reform open to such ethical considerations would require a vigorous change of approach on the part of political leaders,” he said. “I urge them to face this challenge with determination and an eye to the future, while not ignoring, of course, the specifics of each case. Money must serve, not rule!”

The document, which will be soon published in book form in English by Ignatius Press, is considered one of most authoritative of papal statements. Earlier this year, Francis issued his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei* ("Light of Faith"), but it was largely the unfinished work of his predecessor, Benedict XVI. —RNS

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