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Pope Demands Decisive Action on Climate, Poverty, Inequality

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In one of the most politically charged encyclicals in decades, Pope Francis called for global action on climate change, poverty and wealth inequality.

Pope Francis issued an urgent call for “decisive action” on climate change Thursday, in the first papal encyclical dedicated to the environment.

“Doomsday predictions can no longer be met with irony or disdain. We may well be leaving to coming generations debris, desolation and filth,” the pope wrote in the nearly 200-page essay.

The pope described a relentless exploitation and destruction of the environment. He blamed this on apathy, the reckless pursuit of profits, excessive faith in technology and the lack of political vision.

The head of the Vatican said the most vulnerable victims of the destruction of the environment are the world’s poorest people who are being dislocated and disregarded.

Earlier this week, an almost identical draft was leaked to the Italian media ahead of Thursday’s official release. Unlike previous encyclicals, this latest document isn’t just directed at Catholics; rather, it’s intended as a call to action for all people, regardless of belief.

Scientifically literate, impassioned and heavily critical of “throwaway” consumer culture, the encyclical demanded world leaders hear “the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor,” warning against “an unprecedented destruction of ecosystems” looming within the coming decades.

“Once more, we need to reject a magical conception of the market, which would suggest that problems can be solved simply by an increase in the profits of companies or individuals,” he argued.

In particular he singled out the concept of a carbon credit scheme as a “quick and easy solution” that is likely to lead to little more than financial “speculation” that will simply promote the wasteful consumerism antithetical to genuine climate action.

“The pace of consumption, waste and environmental change has so stretched the planet’s capacity that our contemporary lifestyle, unsustainable as it is, can only precipitate catastrophes, such as those which even now periodically occur in different areas of the world ... we need to reflect on our accountability before those who will have to endure the dire consequences,” he wrote.

Addressing climate change denialists, Pope Francis said his dire ecological warnings have been based on “the results of the best scientific research available.” The essay detailed environmental issues ranging from the dangers of industrial waste bioaccumulation, to the threat posed by “synthetic agrotoxins” to wildlife such as insects and birds.

On global warming, the Pope asserted that scientific studies have proven greenhouse gases “released mainly as a result of human activity” are largely to blame.

“A very solid scientific consensus indicates that we are presently witnessing a disturbing warming of the climatic system,” he said.

He also squarely linked climate change to another issue that has already been established as a key theme of his time as head of the Catholic Church – poverty.

The Pope warned that the world's poor will be worst affected by climate change, with disadvantaged communities that rely most on the natural environment for day to day survival most imperiled.

“They have no other financial activities or resources which can enable them to adapt to climate change,” he said.

Pope Francis continued by highlighting the link to wealth inequality, which he argued is inextricably linked to poverty.

In yet another scathing line, the Pope lambasted those who “maintain that current economics and technology will solve all environmental problems, and argue, in popular and non-technical terms, that the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth.”

“We fail to see that some are mired in desperate and degrading poverty, with no way out, while others have not the faintest idea of what to do with their possessions, vainly showing off their supposed superiority and leaving behind them so much waste which, if it were the case everywhere, would destroy the planet,” he said.