

# Opinion

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Another Voice / Climate change

## **Another Voice: Pope Francis puts his weight behind a call for swift action on climate change**

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By Robert M. Ciesielski

The encyclical *Laudato Si* (Praise Be to You), is an epic call by Pope Francis to protect our “common home,” the Earth. All creation is made by God and we can discover God in all things. Humans are not to dominate nature, but must realize that we are fully a part of nature. The document references numerous prior statements on the environment made by John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Catholic bishops.

A major reason for the pope’s release of the encyclical on June 18 was his hope that international negotiators at the Paris Climate Summit scheduled for December may reach a binding climate change agreement.

On more than one occasion the pope has stated that humankind is the major contributor to climate change. In April, a Vatican-sponsored conference of scientists and religious leaders hosted by the Pontifical Academy of Sciences announced that the Paris Summit “may be the last effective opportunity to negotiate arrangements” to reduce global climate change.

Chapter One, Section I of the encyclical is labeled “Pollution and Climate Change” and states firmly “a number of scientific studies indicate that most global warming in recent decades is due to the greater concentration of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, nitrogen oxides and others) released mainly as a result of human activity. ... The problem is aggravated by a model of development based on the intensive use of fossil fuels, which is at the heart of the worldwide energy system.

“Climate change is a global problem with grave implications: environmental, social, economic, political and for the distribution of goods. It represents one of the principal challenges facing humanity in our day.”

Francis emphasizes the “urgent need ... in the next few years” to “drastically” reduce emissions of greenhouse gases by “for example, substituting for fossil fuels and developing sources of renewable energy.”

The encyclical calls for recognition that development of new sources of renewable energy and production could prove to be “very profitable.” In other words, the development of a sustainable economy is not only required, but could be beneficial to all, including those who deny a problem exists.

After reviewing previously unsuccessful worldwide climate conferences, Francis states, “Reducing greenhouse gases requires honesty, courage and responsibility, above all on the part of those countries which are more powerful and pollute the most.”

Francis urges us “to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for which we know that things can change. The Creator does not abandon us ... humanity still has the ability to work together in building a common home.”

Robert M. Ciesielski is chairman of the Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter’s Energy Committee.

