

## **Yet another papal failure**

By Julia Hartley-Brewer, The Telegraph UK, 19 June

If we need the Pope to teach us about science, then God help us all.

What the head of an anti-science body like the Catholic Church says about climate change is about as relevant as Kim Kardashian on the eurozone.

It's a funny old world. Environmentalists are dancing with glee after Pope Francis issued a statement calling on every man, woman and child to stand together to tackle the issue of climate change.

The Pope, after all, is the highly influential leader of 1.2 billion Roman Catholics around the world and a man who can bend the ear of any president or prime minister he wants at any time.

## **An undoubted coup for the eco-lobby**

Getting him on board the green bandwagon is an undoubted coup for the eco-lobby.

His statement came in the form of an encyclical, a papal letter to bishops usually aimed at ending debate on a theological issue, to be formally published today, and it represents the Pope's views on the God-given responsibility of humans to act as custodians of the earth.

Not only does he warn of the "unprecedented destruction of the ecosystem" but, in a less than subtle reference to so-called climate change deniers, the Pope argues that "the attitudes that stand in the way of a solution, even among believers, range from negation of the problem, to indifference, to convenient resignation or blind faith in technical solutions."

Which is weird, because belief and blind faith are precisely what the Pope usually demands of his many followers when it comes to deciding pretty much every area of their lives from the cradle to the grave.

Now, I'm sure Pope Francis is a perfectly decent and moral man who means well and wants nothing but the best for mankind and our planet. But - and it's quite a bit "but" - I'm afraid the Catholic Church lost its right to hand out moral lectures to the rest of the world some time ago.

Whether you are a card-carrying eco-alarmist who worries daily about your carbon footprint or whether you are Jeremy Clarkson, what the Pope has to say about humans tackling climate change as a moral issue is about as relevant as Kim Kardashian's views on the future of the eurozone.

## **The Pope knows next to nothing about climate science**

First, like pretty much all political leaders who put their tuppence worth in on this issue, the Pope knows next to nothing about climate science, which makes his opinion worth as little as

mine (which I'm regularly informed by the likes of eco-worriers like George Monbiot is absolutely zilch).

Secondly, popes don't have a particularly strong track record when it comes to tackling matters of fact and science over the years.

### **It took until 1992 before admitting Galileo was right**

It did, after all, take until 1992 for the Roman Catholic Church to formally acknowledge that it was wrong to persecute Galileo for proving in the 17th century that the Earth moves around the Sun rather than the other way round.

And as recently as 2009, Pope Benedict XVI was busy telling Africans facing the deadly threat of AIDS that condoms would not protect them from HIV, despite all the clear medical evidence to the contrary.

But it's not just matters of science on which Popes have time and again been wrong. It's on matters of basic morality too.

### **The Catholic Church has been on the wrong side on every one**

When it comes to all of the great moral debates of our time, the Catholic Church has been on the wrong side on every one.

Whether it's opposition to contraception, to abortion, the right to die, divorce, gay marriage or women priests, the Catholic Church is clinging onto viewpoints that are stuck in the dark ages and is wrong on every issue.

And on most (but admittedly not all) of those issues, the Church is even out of touch with its own congregations. Last year, an international survey of Catholics found that most disagree with Church teachings on contraception, divorce and abortion – three of the Church's key "moral" stances.

But where popes really come a cropper is when they tell others to get their own houses in order when we all know that the Church has been responsible for one of the most shocking and evil cover-ups of industrial scale child sex abuse by its own priests.

### **The Church has a unique moral culpability**

Of course the Church's legions of abusive priests are not the only people who have harmed children over the years. But since they used their unique access and position of trust in the Church to commit that abuse and, when found out, the Church chose at the highest levels to cover up those crimes, the Church has a unique moral culpability for what has happened to thousands of innocent children.

Even today, the Vatican is still dragging its feet over the attempts to uncover how high up the cover-up went and failing to open up its records to enable the guilty to be prosecuted.

So, for all those reasons, forgive me if I don't think the Pope is in a position to lecture anyone – let alone the entire world – on this issue or anything else.

**If we are going to rely on the Catholic Church to teach us about science or morality,  
then God help us all.**