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CLIMATE NEWS

**Pope Francis**

BY **RYAN KORONOWSKI**

2014 AT 10:42 PM

**One Billion**

change

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*Pope Francis*

CREDIT: AP PHOTO/JORGE SAENZ

At the end of 2015, the nations of the world will meet in Paris and attempt to hammer out a global deal to cut greenhouse gas emissions. And Pope Francis hopes that the world's Catholics, as well as other major religions, will be a big part of serious climate action.

This includes a series of steps next year. Francis is expected to tell the planet's 1.2 billion Catholics why acting on climate change is essential to the faith using an influential church document called an encyclical. This has been long-rumored, but will reportedly be released to the world's 5,000 bishops and 400,000 priests following a papal visit to the hurricane-damaged city of Tacloban in the Philippines.

In September, the Pope will take his message to the U.N. General Assembly in a New York

address next year, according to John Vidal of the Guardian, who cited Vatican insiders. He will reportedly personally lobby political and faith leaders there, with the goal of pushing them to commit to real action ahead of the Paris meetings in December of next year.

While it isn't certain what exactly he will tell these leaders, it will likely be similar to what he has been telling Catholics everywhere since the beginning of his papacy. Earlier this year, Francis told a massive crowd in Rome, "if we destroy Creation, Creation will destroy us!" He has called the destruction of the rainforest a "sin," and under his leadership, the Church held a five-day summit with scientists, economists, philosophers, astronomers, and other experts to explore ways the Catholic church could address climate and sustainability.

Earlier this month during the climate talks in Lima, Catholic bishops from every continent called for "an end to the fossil fuel era." This follows, they said, the need to prioritize "the immediate needs of the most vulnerable communities." Addressing the causes and effects of climate change is a moral and social justice issue for them, as the impacts of a changing climate will disproportionately affect those who can least-ably adapt (and who did not emit most of the pollution in the first place).

Francis' close friend, Argentinian Bishop Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo is the Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy of Sciences and Social Sciences. He said in an annual lecture to the British Catholic group Cafod last month: "today solid scientific evidence exists that global climate is changing and that human activity based on the use of fossil materials contributes decisively to this trend."

Soronado cited Francis' "unique role as a religious leader," and the need for moral guidance to ensure the natural world is developed in a sustainable and socially inclusive way. "The problem of climate change has become a major social and moral problem, and mentalities can only be changed on moral and religious grounds," he said.

Therefore, our Academics supported the Pope's initiative to publish an Encyclical or another such important document on climate and social inclusion to influence next year's crucial decisions. In fact, the idea is to convene a meeting with the religious leaders of the main religions to make all people aware of the state of our climate and the tragedy of social exclusion starting from the biblical message that man is the steward of nature and of its environmental and human development according to its potential and not against it, as Paul IV intended.

The details surrounding this climate meeting with the world's religious leaders are currently unclear, but Francis will likely find some parts of his audience willing and amenable to strong climate action. Earlier this year, a group of evangelical Christians urged President Obama to discuss climate change with the Pope at the Vatican, while another told Florida Governor Rick Scott that climate change was a "pro-life" issue. Leaders from several

different religions encouraged the EPA to regulate carbon dioxide from power plants at the agency's public hearings in July, with some saying carbon pollution is "an affront to God."

On the other hand, a strong majority of white evangelicals in the U.S. believe that worsening natural disasters are a sign of the apocalypse, not climate change, and other conservative evangelical sects will likely oppose Francis' efforts.

"The pope should back off," said Calvin Beisner, spokesman for the conservative evangelical Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation. "The Catholic church is correct on the ethical principles but has been misled on the science. It follows that the policies the Vatican is promoting are incorrect. Our position reflects the views of millions of evangelical Christians in the US."

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