Pope ‘ignored population issue’

Ben Webster

Pope Francis avoided the key issue of population growth in his encyclical seeking action on climate change, according to a charity. He was accused of calling for others to act while failing to allow Roman Catholics to use artificial contraception.

Population Matters, which seeks to reduce population growth and has the broadcaster Sir David Attenborough as its patron, said that the Pope had more power than anyone because a change in his teaching could prevent hundreds of millions of births.

The 192-page encyclical, Laudato Si (Be Praised), On the Care of Our Common Home, deals with population growth in two sentences, blaming climate change chiefly on consumerism.

Simon Ross, chief executive of Population Matters, accused the Pope of “sidestepping” the issue. “The one thing that would make the biggest contribution to the Pope’s twin goals of poverty alleviation and environmental conservation would be abandoning the Catholic church’s condemnation of modern family planning,” he said.

The global population had doubled to 7 billion in 50 years, with the UN projecting 11 billion by 2100, he added.

Europeans tended to ignore the church’s ban on contraception, he said, but two thirds of the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics lived in Asia, Africa and Latin America, where the church’s influence was limited access. Lord Lawson of Blaby, former chancellor and founder of the climate sceptic Global Warming Policy Foundation, condemned the encyclical as “a mixture of junk science, junk economics and junk ethics”.