

The Malthusian Ideology Of Pope Francis's Encyclical Is Bad For The Poor

Ned Mamula

September 16, 2015

In his May encyclical, Pope Francis captured reader interest with an appeal to the deep sense of awe stemming from our attempts to comprehend complex natural processes of geology, biology, climatology, and others that comprise our ecosystem.

Unfortunately, interwoven with the science are familiar Malthusian ideological themes: excessive consumption by wealthy nations is responsible for climate change and the world's poor are negatively and disproportionately affected'.

Not to worry though, because the encyclical follows up with matching ideological solutions. It implies that wealthy Western nations need to: quickly restrict and eventually eliminate all fossil fuel consumption, rush to develop renewable energy resources to power the Earth and clean up the environment, enable third world nations to eventually begin using renewables in their own grid, and, of course, foot the bill for all of it.

Part of the encyclical's theme actually mirrors EPA's recently published Clean Power Plan (CPP). Both documents attempt to foist expensive, unreliable, and unworkable "renewable" solar and wind power upon situations where it will not deliver for either wealthy nations or third world countries.

Pope Francis should realize we are truly blessed with our abundant energy resources. Just this year, the United States became the world's top producer of oil and gas, and there is no end in sight to the vast energy supplies contained within our country and in other nations. Oil and natural gas production, particularly from the enormous U.S. shale-bearing basins, are at record-breaking levels and prices are continuing to drop — an enormous help to the poor, who spend an inordinate amount of their earnings on energy.

Now, for the first time in many years, we are taking more control of our energy and environmental future, and that of our allies. Supplies of oil and gas appear to be abundant worldwide. Thankfully, using cleaner natural gas in place of coal for power generation has cut carbon emissions by over 50 per cent, and that number is continuing to fall.

It follows that other countries are slowly gaining the extensive knowledge required to produce from shale, and some undeveloped countries can now see themselves participating in the "shale

revolution” and producing sufficient energy to build their economies and address their national dreams and desires, just as we have done in the U.S. and in other Western nations.

As the Pope surely knows, the scriptures (Psalm 104:24 for example) teach that mankind is endowed with the wealth from the earth — from the rocks, surface waters, lifeforms, oceans, and atmosphere — and that we derive various forms and quantities of energy from each of these environments to sustain our lives and our progeny. It would appear that the papal encyclical’s discussion on man’s use of energy resources contains a major contradiction that must be addressed.

First, the petroleum industry is supplying our world with incredible amounts of cheap, plentiful natural gas and oil from the U.S. energy renaissance and the shale revolution now underway in this country, may be exported to others with vast shale oil and gas deposits in their countries. Energy is required to bring poor nations up to the standard of living enjoyed by developed nations.

Second, the intermittent nature of renewables such as wind and solar means in the continued absence of storage technologies we have not yet been able to generate sufficient quantities of renewable energy for ourselves, let alone in nations lacking basic infrastructure. Crucially, it is in those places where the less fortunate really need cheap and reliable energy.

Therefore, the question then becomes: Why would the Pontiff want to rob Peter to pay Paul, so to speak, by not encouraging the use of abundant fossil fuel energy to help lift the poor out of poverty, instead advocating the use of renewable energy sources that are still decades away in terms of its reliability and cost, especially in underdeveloped regions of the world?

It is now within our power to export energy to poor, friendly nations and trading partners to help them keep their lights on, warm their homes, refrigerate their food and power their industry—just the way we in the West have done for the past hundred years of the petroleum industry. We are in an excellent position to export our natural endowments and shale technology to those less fortunate to produce from their own resource wealth.

This is our moral obligation. Surely the Pontiff would not object to America and the Western world sharing our wealth to lift the poor out of their energy poverty...would he?

Ned Mamula is an Adjunct Scholar at the Cato Institute