Protect God’s creation: Vatican issues new green message for world’s Catholics

Sea change
An Arctic coastline yesterday where the sea is usually still frozen at this time of year. The Vatican has added its voice to concerns over global warming. Photograph: Francois Lenoir/Reuters
US church leaders lobby Bush on global warming

John Vidal Tom Kington Rome

The Vatican yesterday added its voice to a rising chorus of warnings from churches around the world that climate change and abuse of the environment is against God's will, and that the one billion-strong Catholic church must become far greener.

At a Vatican conference on climate change, Pope Benedict urged bishops, scientists and politicians - including UK environment secretary David Miliband - to "respect creation" while "focusing on the needs of sustainable development".

The Pope's message follows a series of increasingly strong statements about climate change from younger congregations. In the US the diverse 500-strong conservative evangelical churches are increasingly at war about the human contribution to global warming.

Many evangelical leaders say they are still not convinced that global warming is human-induced and have argued that the collapse of the world is inevitable and will herald the second coming of Christ.

But most younger leaders have broken ranks. About four years ago the progressives began to argue strongly that man had a responsibility to steward the earth. Redefining environmentalism as "creation care", they are now lobbying President Bush and the US administration to take global warming far more seriously.

"They are the most effective lobby," said one observer yesterday. "They represent the conservative vote so Bush has to listen to them."

Observers said yesterday that the Catholic church is no longer split between those who advocate development and those who say the environment is the priority. Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martino, head of the Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, said: "For environment ... read Creation.

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... ," said Claire Foster, environmental policy adviser to the Church of England.

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