

Francis continues to make us all a bit uncomfortable

From his stance on migrants to his encyclical *Laudato si'*, the pope causes controversy

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Pope Francis is an equal opportunity offender.

No matter where you place yourself along the Catholic Church's broad spectrum – right, left or center; conservative or liberal; traditional or progressive – if you are not challenged and even disturbed by some of the things this pope says and does, then you are not paying attention.

And that includes any of you who may consider yourselves "Pope Francis groupies" or "my-pope-right-or-wrong" Catholics. If he is not getting just a little bit under your skin then you are not listening, either.

Despite what some of his more traditionalist critics claim, Francis is not politically correct. He is, in fact, quite out-spoken. He is prophetic.

That is because he is, without a doubt, one of the most radically evangelical popes the Church has ever seen. And his radical reading of the Gospel, like that of his sainted namesake from Assisi more than 800 year ago, calls into question and serves as a critique to all ideologies, life styles and ways of thinking.

It is well-known by now, that the 82-year-old pope's insistence that the world's affluent societies be more generous in welcoming and integrating migrants and refugees is causing an uproar among the residents of those societies.

Ironically, some of the fiercest opponents to Francis' take on immigration are immigrants themselves or, like the pope, children of immigrants.

And it is no secret that the Italian-Argentinian pope's criticism of unbridled capitalism and his call for a fairer distribution of the world's wealth and resources have rubbed many pro-capitalist Catholics the wrong way.

But believers who oppose Francis on these issues are not the only ones who find some of his teachings hard to accept.

Hot time, summer in the city

This was confirmed recently in a message posted on Twitter by someone most people would consider a progressive Catholic.

"There are several parts of [@Pontifex](#) [#LaudatoSi](#) with which I vehemently disagree. One has to do with his stance on air conditioning," said this person, who also happens to be Catholic university professor of theology, ethics and the environment.

Laudato si' is, of course, the controversial encyclical "[on the care of our common home](#)," which Francis published four years ago. And the author of the tweet is

actually enthusiastic about this 2014 document on issues relating to preservation of the environment and all God's creation (people included).

But, evidently, the pope's take on A/C is just a bit too much of a challenge to this professor's comfort zone.

"Air-conditioning in muggy climates is a gift from the heavens. Specifically, it dehumidifiers and cools the heavens, and that is a godsend," this "green" Catholic concluded.

Another progressive-minded Catholic chimed in:

"I do think that in some places it (A/C) is a life saving necessity because of excessive heat and because of allergies. That said, it does not have to be blasting everywhere at all times."

But what does our current Bishop of Rome actually say about the matter in his encyclical? He makes only one reference. It's found in paragraph 55 of the text.

And it seems to be a direct answer to our aforementioned Tweeters.

It's about more than just A/C

"People may well have a growing ecological sensitivity but it has not succeeded in changing their harmful habits of consumption which, rather than decreasing, appear to be growing all the more. A simple example is the increasing use and power of air-conditioning," the pope writes.

"The markets, which immediately benefit from sales, stimulate ever greater demand," he continues.

Francis comes to a somewhat different conclusion than that of his critics. "An outsider looking at our world would be amazed at such behavior, which at times appears self-destructive," he says.

Yes, this seems like a hard teaching. But just stop and think: how in the world did we survive thousands of years before A/C was invented?

Even just 20 or so years ago, air-conditioning was not very common throughout most places in Italy, for example. And most people in this country are still ambivalent about using it today.

Unfortunately, that has more to do with the fear that re-circulated air is unhealthy, rather than its ill effects on the environment, which is why many Italians use AC with windows cracked open – to let in "fresh" or natural air!

Life without air-conditioning, even in hot places like Rome in July and August, is not impossible. It used to be the norm. There were age-old strategies to keep us from burning up, such as drawing the blinds and using a fan or two.

The pace of life (and work) slowed down considerably when there was no A/C. And people's appetites were curbed significantly. These were never considered bad things. In fact, the change of the daily rhythm was considered to be in tune with nature and a very healthy thing indeed.

But our ever-more consumerist society and the craze to produce more and more put little value on downtime.

Getting in tune with nature

Pope Francis is right to criticize the excessive use (and abuse) of air-conditioning.

"Nobody is suggesting a return to the Stone Age, but we do need to slow down and look at reality in a different way, to appropriate the positive and sustainable progress which has been made, but also to recover the values and the great goals swept away by our unrestrained delusions of grandeur," he says (LS, 122).

Because, as the pope says, "Where profits alone count, there can be no thinking about the rhythms of nature..." (LS, 190).

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