

Pope Francis ignores AC's many benefits

BY BILL DUNN

I am grateful that my full-time job is in the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning industry. There, I said it. Pope Francis is going to be so upset



with me. If you haven't heard, the pope's recent encyclical on the environment claims air conditioning is

one of the world's "harmful habits of consumption."

Yes, air conditioning requires a sizable amount of energy. But just think what the world would be like if we stopped using air conditioning. Confined to sweltering hospitals, more people would die rather than recover. More elderly people would succumb during heat waves. Nursing homes would be uninhabitable, as would major cities in southern climates.

And air conditioning is the same technology that brings us refrigeration. Without refrigeration, modern medicine could not exist. Without refrigeration, food could not be transported safely across the country. Without refrigeration, thousands — if not millions — of people would die of food poisoning or starvation.

I hate to say this, but it seems Francis has received some inaccurate advice on this topic. When mankind learned to harness nature's condensation-evaporation cycle a little more than a century ago, it was a *good* thing. The development of air conditioning and refrigeration has improved the lives of countless millions of people. In fact, it has *saved* the lives of countless millions of people. Does the pope think flush toilets and clean drinking water are "harmful habits of consumption," too?

The Book of Genesis says, "God created man in his image." A big part of that image is creativity. We imitate and honor God when we employ our creative skills. Discovering and utilizing technologies that improve and save lives is not a squandering of natural resources.

If the pope were referring to the fact many air-conditioning systems make buildings too cold and waste energy in the process, well, that is a legitimate concern. There are many systems out there, especially older systems, that have poor controls and run at full speed all the time. On muggy days, instead of making the interior space of a building a pleasant 76 degrees, these systems turn the rooms into meat lockers. The solution here is to invest in newer technology with smarter controls, which can achieve the desired temperature while using less energy.

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It's kind of ironic the pope criticizes air conditioning at the same time the Carrier Corp. is donating an expensive, sophisticated climate-control system for the Sistine Chapel, which is needed to keep Michelangelo's priceless artwork from being ruined. The cover story of the June 2015 issue of the ASHRAE Journal addresses this project in detail. (ASHRAE is the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration, and Air-Conditioning Engineers, and I'm proud to say I was the president of the Connecticut Chapter in 2007.)

The pope's encyclical on the environment offers some thought-provoking statements about mankind's God-given role as stewards of this planet. There are many things in the encyclical we should take to heart, especially on a personal level ... though the pope's call for larger and more powerful government to impose restrictions on people's lives made my libertarian sensibilities cringe a bit.

People often ask, "What would Jesus do?" I believe if Jesus walked the earth today, on a steamy summer day, He would say, "Wow, it's hot out! Close the windows and crank up the AC!"

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