

I am a gear-head and have always been one. As a kid I would talk hours with my cousins and uncles about cars: what's the fastest, who has the best engineering, who has the best style.

The Buick Century could reach 100 mph and I remember my cousin and I in the back seat of one yelling "faster, faster" to my uncle who was at the wheel of a Century.

I was first in line at the DMV on my sixteenth birthday to get my driver's license. I drove away from the DMV and had a tremendous feeling of FREEDOM. For the first time in my life I could go anywhere I wanted and rapidly too compared to my old Schwinn bike and explore the world. My father, God bless him, felt otherwise: he was a musician and cars for him were for carrying musical instruments. He could never fathom my exhilaration of actually driving a car.

I also grew up defending what I was taught about Catholicism: I did not attend religious services of those of a different faith; I waited until after midnight on a Friday night to eat a hamburger; I prayed for the poor souls in purgatory. Those that disagreed with the Church and me were, of course, heretical — like Martin Luther.

(By the way, I just read that the Vatican has approved the name of a new Piazza near the Coliseum: Piazza Martin Lutero. My, how views have changed in 500 years. I don't know, however, the official status of Galileo at this time with the Vatican.)

In addition to cars and Catholicism I have been into nature and ecology; I was a member of the Sierra Club years ago (until they supported abortion on the grounds that the more kids there are the more trees that will have to be cut down); I have replaced my sprinklers with low output sprinklers and drip watering systems; I replaced half of my grass with artificial grass; I have changed to low energy light bulbs, etc.

Recently, I eagerly awaited the Pope's new Encyclical. Oh, sure, its not an ex-cathedra statement with the stamp of infallibility. But a Papal Encyclical is nothing to sneeze at. In the middle of our recent local heat and humidity wave, I decided to sit in my air-conditioned home and read about it.

You guessed it. The encyclical decries the use of air conditioning as reflecting "a harmful habit of consumption." My ears perked up a bit.

Then His Holiness really got to me: The encyclical is, generally, against the automobile: "Many cars, used by one or more people, circulate in cities...raising the level of pollution and consuming enormous quantities of energy." The Pope, apparently has been favorably impressed by some areas in South America where bus lanes have been made down the very center of some of the most popular roads used by automobiles. This gives those who cannot afford a car a certain amount of leveling of the playing field. In fact, there is a sense that if you actually LIKE air conditioning and cars, somehow you are against the poor and suffering of this world.

Hmmm. OK. I don't agree with some points of the Pope's new encyclical. But now what do I do? What does one do if you disagree with the Pope? Am I not a True Catholic? Can I still be a Knight of Columbus? Am I now a heretic like the ones I used to rail against years ago?

If there is any consolation, maybe 500 years from now someone will name a square in Rome "Piazza Charles Ettari."