The pope enters the environmental fray

Last week the pope set off an uproar over his encyclical entitled *Laudato Si’* — a document on the environment, the very real threat of climate change, and the connection of these issues with concern for the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters. Critics, especially politicians, are arguing that the pope should stick to matters of religion and leave science to the experts, as though the two fields were mutually exclusive. Ironically in the face of such criticism, the pope engaged leading experts, foremost among them Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, founder and head of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research and an environmental advisor to Angela Merkel of Germany. By aligning himself with mainstream scientific thinking, Francis has provoked criticism from climate change deniers, many of whom attacked him well before the encyclical was issued.

Some Catholic presidential hopefuls have been among the critics, notably Jeb Bush and Rick Santorum. On the day of the document’s publication, Bush said he doesn’t “look to the pope for advice on economic policies,” and Santorum charged that the pope shouldn’t try to be a scientist, even when Santorum has made policy statements that would portray himself as a medical expert! Many conservative Catholics perceive the encyclical as an attack on capitalism and as political meddling.

But the content of the document “gives Francis a very traditional basis to argue for the inclusion of environmental concern at the center of Christian faith,” said Vincent Miller, who holds a chair in Catholic theology and culture at the University of Dayton. “The basic idea is, in order to love God, you have to love your fellow human beings, and you have to love and care for the rest of creation.” He added that while critics say that “the church can’t teach policy, can’t teach politics, Francis is saying ‘No, these things are at the very core of the church’s teaching.’”

President Obama welcomed the encyclical, saying that “I deeply admire the pope’s decision to make the case — clearly, powerfully, and with the full moral authority of his position — for action on global climate change. As Pope Francis so eloquently stated, we have a profound responsibility to protect our children, and our children’s children, from the damaging impacts of climate change.” The president went on to say that he looked forward to discussing these issues with the pope when Francis visits the White House in September.
The pope’s ideas are at the core of Franciscan spirituality, inspired by the life and teachings of Francis of Assisi, said Patrick Carolan, executive director of the Franciscan Action Network, a coalition of Franciscan orders working on social justice issues. “We Franciscans have been at this for 800 years,” he added.

A plethora of resources have been made available to pastors in most dioceses to aid them in promoting Francis’ optimistic “call to action:” writing that “All is not lost...Human beings, while capable of the worst, are also capable of rising above themselves, choosing again what is good, and making a new start.”

**Diamond jubilarians (60 years of religious life)**

Elroy Pesch: “On the feast of St. Ann, I was at a parish picnic when I heard my Aunt Laura say to her neighbor that she wouldn’t be surprised if I became a priest. I was 13 years old and just finished elementary school. I went to my pastor and told him I wanted to be a priest. He told my parents. Five weeks later I was at St. Lawrence. Gerald Walker was the rector during my four years of high school and was very influential and supportive in my life. Gratian Zach made me a Third Order member as soon as I turned 14. I still wear the rosary that I received 61 years ago from Cyprian Abler.

“Even before ordination, I was assigned to teaching in several schools, in order to overcome shyness. I was sent to St. Elizabeth’s in Milwaukee. After our pastoral training year, Gerard Hesse assigned me to Crown Point, and I studied for three years at Fordham University. In August 1967, I arrived at St. Lawrence to relieve Francis Heidenreich, who had been commuting between Crown Point and Mt. Calvary. This August, I will mark 48 years at St. Lawrence.

“Because of a stroke in 2003, I was asked to stop teaching in 2004. Since then I have been doing help-outs, averaging five to six liturgies and homilies a week.

“At the wedding feast in Cana of Galilee, after Mary told Jesus they have no more wine, and Jesus said His time had not yet come, Mary went to the headwaiter and said, “Do whatever He tells you!” That is my goal! My vocation has been the greatest blessing God gave me. May I never disappoint him!”

Joachim Strupp: “In my years as a Capuchin, I have had a variety of ministries and places where I lived. It was and is a rich experience. The Capuchin Order has evolved since I made my first profession on September 1st, 1955. We were very province-centered. Now I think we are becoming more ‘whole-order’ centered. We are more open to collaborate with other provinces, some on other continents. Also the membership of our province has become more multi-cultural, reflecting what’s going on in the rest of our country.

The inter-provincial novitiate, where I now live, also bodes well for the future of the Capuchin Order in the U.S. Vocations are picking up in most of the provinces represented here. The novices of today have a much richer introduction to Capuchin life than I did as a novice. I think the Capuchin Order has a bright future. We won’t have the number of friars or provinces we once had, but the Capuchin presence and way of ministry will continue to proclaim far into the future that the message of Jesus Christ that the Kingdom of God is among us.
There were some rough years, but I give heartfelt thanks for my vocation to the Capuchin Order. I give very much thanks for all the Province of St. Joseph has done for me, for the friars who have inspired and challenged me, and for the ministries I have served. A favorite quote: “We get too old fast and too late smart.”

André Weller: Forty-five of my sixty years as a Capuchin, I have lived overseas in mission. A few years after my first profession, I heard the ditty: “Join the Capuchins and see the world!” Sounded fascinating, but for a young Capuchin from a small town in Wisconsin, it also sounded improbable.

Shortly after ordination in 1963, I volunteered for the missions in Nicaragua. God said “not yet” as I had a reaction to my yellow fever vaccine that left me hospitalized for several weeks on two different occasions and “state-side” for another two and a half years of recuperation. It was a blessing in disguise. During that time I was given “hands-on” classes working with and ministering to several minorities in our St. Anthony Hospital in Milwaukee; with those deprived of their freedom through jail ministry and as chaplain of the city morgue with those experiencing tragic loss of loved ones. I was being prepared emotionally, psychologically and spiritually with skills that would make it possible for me to see Jesus in all “the little ones, the powerless and voiceless” in the next forty-five years in different parts of the world.

Two other “pluses” in sitting-it-out as I waited for a doctor’s release to go to Nicaragua: the opportunity to be one of the first Capuchin-to-be-missioners to be prepared adequately with special language and cross-cultural skills in Cuernavaca, Mexico. In 1966, our Capuchin superiors accepted a new mission in Nicaragua in the Diocese of Estelí (northern-central part of Nicaragua). Arriving in Nicaragua on January 10, 1967, I was assigned to Condega (on the Pan American Highway), a small town of four thousand people, with a grade school up to 6th grade. That was the end of formal education for most! With the townspeople and local authorities, together we started a junior-senior-vocational high school which continues today under the guidance of the Marist Brothers. After eleven years in Nicaragua, typhoid fever sent me back to the states to recuperate.

Again, God had other plans… Not Central America again, but the Middle East! Seven years ministering to foreign workers in one country, then three years in Jerusalem as coordinator of the Pontifical Mission for Palestine (the Holy Father’s charity to the Palestinian people). A quick return to the States in Hispanic ministry in Chicago for two years (1989-91), followed by twenty-two years in Panama, again with “the little ones, the powerless and voiceless.” I worked with the teen moms, the elderly, the pre-schoolers, members of several Native Indian communities, those with varying degrees of disabilities, school drop-outs, and addicts. All these wonderful persons showed me how much God loves each of us as we reach out to one another. The “delay” I experienced forty five years earlier before going to the missions prepared me not only “to see the world as a Capuchin,” but to live my Capuchin vocation in many parts of the world. Now today, I am adding Capuchin flavor and witness in the Diocese of Tucson, AZ.

**Weekly re:Cap** offers prayerful best wishes to all of our 2015 jubilarians. We will feature more of our celebrants in the weeks ahead.

*Reminder: The provincial celebration of religious jubilees is scheduled for 17 July at Holy Cross Church in Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin.*
Having been diagnosed with inoperable pancreatic cancer, Dan Kabat will enter hospice care.

David Graves, father of Jason, recently underwent surgery and is currently in rehabilitation.

Thanks for the many expressions of fraternal solidarity on the occasion of my recent cataract surgeries. Especially gratifying were the dozens of emails I received with promises of prayers. The day before the first surgery I happened to be reader at Mass. The passage that day was the account of the devout Tobit and the incontinent sparrows who caused his blindness. By then my sight was so bad I was straining to see the lectionary, and I nearly cracked up when I read this section. Fortunately, today’s "angel Raphael" has more to offer than eye-salve made from fish gall! Both surgeries were flawless and I can now see perfectly, at least at a distance. — Ed Hagman

**The last word...**

“Poetry is born in the caverns of the human heart, pausing before that which yearns. Poetry can contribute to social justice when it moves others’ hearts, wakes people up to the world around them, stirs the moral imagination, or kindles the embers of hope.”

— Jean Stokan (Director, Justice Team of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas)