

[Pope Francis's Vision for Civic and Political Love in the Context of Care for our Common](#)

[Home](#)

[Matthew Chiari](#)

[For the multi-media version of this paper, either click the hyperlink provided above, or use the following: <https://spark.adobe.com/page/J2LZlwvfmv5KB/>]

Chapter 6, Section 5 of *Laudato Si*, by Pope Francis

[V. CIVIC AND POLITICAL LOVE

228. Care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion. Jesus reminded us that we have God as our common Father and that this makes us brothers and sisters. Fraternal love can only be gratuitous; it can never be a means of repaying others for what they have done or will do for us. That is why it is possible to love our enemies. This same gratuitousness inspires us to love and accept the wind, the sun, and the clouds, even though we cannot control them. In this sense, we can speak of a “universal fraternity”.

229. We must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world, and that being good and decent are worth it. We have had enough of immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith, and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good. When the foundations of social life are corroded, what ensues are battles over conflicting interests, new forms of violence and brutality, and obstacles to the growth of a genuine culture of care for the environment.

230. Saint Therese of Lisieux invites us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on a kind word, a smile or any small gesture which sows peace and friendship. An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation, and selfishness. In the end, a world of exacerbated consumption is at the same time a world which mistreats life in all its forms.

231. Love, overflowing with small gestures of mutual care, is also civic and political, and it makes itself felt in every action that seeks to build a better world. Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also “macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones”.[156] That is why the Church set before the world the ideal of a “civilization of love”.[157] Social love is the key to authentic development: “In order to make society more human, more worthy of the human person, love in social life – political, economic and cultural – must be given renewed value, becoming the constant and highest norm for all activity”.[158] In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies to halt environmental degradation and to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society. When we feel that God is calling us to intervene with others in these social dynamics, we should realize that this too is part of our spirituality, which is an exercise of charity and, as such, matures and sanctifies us.

232. Not everyone is called to engage directly in political life. Society is also enriched by a countless array of organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment, whether natural or urban. Some, for example, show concern for a public place (a building, a fountain, an abandoned monument, a landscape, a square), and strive to protect, restore, improve or beautify it as something belonging to everyone. Around these community actions, relationships develop or are recovered, and a new social fabric emerges. Thus, a community can break out of the indifference induced by consumerism. These actions cultivate a shared identity, with a story which can be remembered and handed on. In this way, the world, and the quality of life of the poorest, are cared for, with a sense of solidarity which is at the same time aware that we live in a common home which God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences.

Within the very first line of chapter 6, section 5 of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis clearly explains what this section is about “Care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for

living together and communion.” (Laudato Si par. 228) As the section progresses, it is clear that Pope Francis, believes that we have lost this connection and that we have to regain it. However, how have we lost this connection in the first place? Well for starters, we do not love each other as we should. Pope Francis mentions in Laudato Si that through God we are all connected, and form as he says a “universal fraternity” (Laudato Si par.228). This fraternity is not just limited to humans but also to the very Earth itself. By loving each other and the Earth we can care for each other and the planet and form this fraternity.

The truth of the matter is that humanity does not love itself as it should. We have allowed this connection to be corrupted and the love that should be civic and political, has become influenced by power, greed, and pride. We have forgotten what the Earth truly is to us which is our home. However, Earth is more than just our home, it is also a city. Now as used by Dante, a city does not mean a literal city. Instead a city is a place where love is clearly present in some form. Take for example, the Mystical Rose which was the city that embodied the truest form of love, “Now see how many are in the convent of the white rose. Behold our far-flung city.” (Dante, v.128-129, pg.864). Look at the Gates of Purgatory which represented the love that has been misused, “Seven P’s, the seven scars of sin, his sword point cut into my brow.” (Dante, v.112-113, pg.361). Now look at Earth and what do you see? There is definitely love present on Earth but there is misused love too. By doing this we have forgotten why true love is and we have also forgotten to love the Earth.

Take for example the movie the Secret of the Kells. In this movie and kid named Brenden and his village are preparing their town for the inevitable attack of the Vikings. As time passes, Brenden is forced to go into the woods where he meets Aisling and rediscovers this world that has been closed off from him. Why the goal of the town is pure, their actions have caused them to be separate from the woods and they have lost their connection to the world. If we look at our own world, we can see that we too have lost this connection to a degree. As mentioned, pride, power, and greed have seeped into our love and have influenced us to increase them. How many wars

have been fought over natural resources, wars that have laid waste to areas, and have killed countless people? One only must look at history to see it.

For example, look at the Conquistadors of Spain who went to the new world. They said that their mission was first and foremost to spread Christianity to the new world, yet we know that is not what occurred. They discovered various Native American groups living in South America and conquered them, destroying ancient civilizations all so they could collect their gold. They willingly killed other humans to take what they had because they wanted it. In the movie *The Mission*, this devastation is also shown at the end of the movie. *The Mission* is about a group of missionaries that go to the New World and convert a group of Native Americans called the Guaraní to Christianity. These strangers that were once completely unknown to each other managed to come together and become one group. However, as the end of the film we see the Portuguese and the Spanish who want the land of the Guaraní come and destroy the village. During a time where religion played a bigger part in our world, the movie shows Christians kill other Christians because they wanted what they had.

While the love that binds us to our neighbor and Earth has been corrupted to a degree, it is not gone. It is still there, and we see it every day. In fact, Pope Francis calls on us to not necessarily engage in the big acts of love but the small ones as well (*Laudato Si* par.230). These small forms of love are also civic and political and perhaps carry an even greater effect. They say that sometimes it is the small things that mean the most and that is true. These small acts of love can be anything, from holding the door for someone, smiling at someone when you talked to them and even just saying thank you. Many would call these acts kindness but is not a kindness a part of love? Love in it of itself is many different things. For instance, the Greeks categorized love many different ways with the main ones being Eros, Philla, Storge, and Agape. The first three loves are passionate, friendship, and familiar love respectively. The final love, Agape is love that is universal and is the love that God shares with us (*The Official*). Now why mention this? Well today when one talks about love many connected it to sexual love. However, this is not the case for love can

simply be being nice to one another. It is these simple acts that we can use to answer Pope Francis call to “regain the conviction that we need one another” (Laudato Si par.229).

Once we reform this connection between us than we will be able to truly care for the Earth once more. We have to remember that the Earth is our home and that we were put here by God. As Augustine says in the Confessions it is God that has given us the Earth and the “...gift that I exist at all” (Confessions 1.31, Ruden 33). Augustine goes on to explain that we must persevere this gift that God has given us, but this is something that we all must do. To do this we all must be in this together for if we are not then we will fail. We must remember that we are all humans and that we all deserve to be treated the right way. We must remember to love one another even when that is hard. By doing this we will be able to reform the connection of love that has been diminished and in turn reform the connection that we share with the Earth.

These civic and political loves that Pope Francis is calling for us to do are not easy. It is difficult to love and even more difficult to love those you do not know, or do not like. However, no one is saying that it will be easy. Challenge allows us to become stronger and by only overcoming adversity can we truly understand Pope Francis’ call for civic and political love. When Dante went on his journey through Hell, Purgatory, and finally Heaven, he was finally able to understand what true love is “What then I saw is more than tongue can say...the ravished memory swoons and falls away.” (Dante, v.54-56, pg.891). He learned how not to love and how love can be misused.

To truly understand what Pope Francis means by civic love, a journey like Dante’s is perhaps necessary for us to undergo. In fact, most people probably have or are currently undergoing this journey. Every day we face challenges and these challenges make us stronger. They may even allow us to see the mistakes we have made, which in turn allows us to grow. Take for example the current pandemic that is the world is in. While many of us are doing just fine, this pandemic has created new challenges for us all to face. It has also given us the ability to perhaps slow down and think. I know that I have, and it has been an odd blessing for me. This pandemic

has also made me appreciate certain things more and I think that this is a lesson that we all can use. If we just take a moment to think we can begin to realize things about ourselves, both good and bad. From this, we can work on the bad and make the good better. By working on ourselves first, we can eventually help others, the main meaning behind Pope Francis's civic and political love. And when we begin to help each other, we help to mend this “universal fraternity” and in turn our common home.

This essay served as a Final Assignment for T/RS 122: Introduction to Christian Theology at The University of Scranton, under the direction of Dr. Cyrus P. Olsen III.

#### Work Cited

Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy*. Translated by John Ciardi, New American Library, 2003.

Augustine. *Confessions*. Translated by Sarah Ruden, The Modern Library, 2018.

Pope Francis. *Encyclical Letter Laudato Si' of the Holy Father Francis, On Care for Our Common Home*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015.

Website, The Official. "Four Types of Love - Official Site." *Official Site / CSLewis.com*, 13 Feb. 2020, [www.cslewis.com/four-types-of-love](http://www.cslewis.com/four-types-of-love).

Joffé Roland, *The Mission*. Warner Brothers, 1986.

Tomm Moore, *The Secret of the Kells*. Carton Saloon, 2010.