

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

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### **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.

[156] BENEDICT XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (29 June 2009) 2: AAS 101 (2009), 642.

[157] PAUL VI, *Message for the 1977 World Day of Peace*: AAS 68 (1976), 709.

[158] PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 582.]

Pope Francis's *Laudato Si* provides important and impactful commentary on the human race's obligation to the planet and role in climate change. With special consideration to section five, chapter six of the piece, Pope Francis expands on the ideas of civic and political love to aid in furthering the agenda of environmental conservation. In this selection, use of common themes of love as emphasized in numerous Christian media sources, along with ideas of civic and political love are utilized to emphasize the importance of care for our common home.

One of the first ideas explored by Pope Francis in "Civic and Political Love" is the part that love of one's brethren plays in leading a life conscious and appreciative of the world around us. He brings attention to Jesus's teaching that God is our common Father, making everyone around us our brothers and sisters. It is because of this connection to those around us that we are able to appreciate and care for the wonders of nature, citing that "Fraternal love can only be

gratuitous” (paragraph 228). Just as much as our neighbors are united as God’s children, nature is included in this fraternity that spans universe wide. God’s love for his creation and the justification that that love is emulated in us provides a societal blueprint for expanding love to include care for our planet.

Furthering such ideas, creating a basis of universal respect and care for our surroundings would naturally transform the very construct of society as we know it. If every person on earth committed to leading a life in love and consciousness of their actions’ effects on others, the practice would reasonably become common place in all policies. Individualistic philosophies of charity and love would give rise to governmental and economic relations with the same values, and a widespread standard of compassion for environmental interests would become second nature. Mirroring God’s immaculate love for all of his creation brings Christians closer to his divinity, and in adopting these principles would become more morally and spiritually sound. It was God’s intention in creating humankind for his creation to love as he does and rejecting current consumerism standard for a civilization based on love would embody the hope for humankind set in place by our common heavenly father.

Humankind’s disrespect and lack of concern for the environment has been a display of widespread violence. Careless pollution of the Earth and its resources facilitated by “throwaway culture” disregards the gift of life God has given us in love. Such carelessness certainly can be regarded as a horrific sin, and necessary measures need to be taken to counteract our indiscretions. Repentance for these crimes against the environment includes uniting together to intervene in our current dynamics of culture, rebranding our actions in love (Laudato Si, paragraph 231). The human race must recognize that our present behavior is unacceptable, and

exercise care to our fellow living beings. It is through this compassion for our home that we may achieve salvation despite the atrocities we have subjected to the earth. Recognizing where transgressions have taken place is an important step in transforming future behavior as outlined in Augustine's *Confessions* (Confessions chapter IV). Augustine teaches that God celebrates those who repent for their sins, saying "merciful Father, dost more rejoice over one penitent than over ninety-nine just persons that need no repentance" (Confessions Chapter III). The merciful God depicted in *Confessions* is the mirror image of the father of all depicted by Pope Francis in his work, and surely would welcome those self-aware of their environmental misdeeds with open arms.

Relevant Christian themes of what living in love can accomplish are artistically displayed in scenes of the 1986 film *The Mission*. In one scene, Robert De Niro's character, Rodrigo, recites a passage from 1 Corinthians. This excerpt from the bible describes love and its importance in one's life. Someone can be so extraordinarily gifted in so many ways but are "nothing" if they do not have love (Corinthians). Love is described in this passage as patient, kind, and selfless. The humility of love as described in this bible passage parallels with the fraternal love Pope Francis references in *Laudato Si* (paragraph 228). This recitation is prompted in celebration of thanks for the Guarani peoples. Rodrigo achieves redemption and is saved from the sin of his past through charity, and his graciousness imitates the very spirit of God's divine love. Similarly, the essence of love captured by the ideas expressed in 1 Corinthians harnesses the key to achieving a better world in present day. Like in Corinthians, humankind can achieve remarkable advances in technology and venture great lengths in several walks of life, but they are meaningless without love and care for our common home. It is selflessness concern for the

wonders of the natural world that shelters us and gives a place to call home that will provide salvation to the horrors of our present disrespect of our great planet.

The imagery and symbolism utilized in Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* in describing the harmony and bliss of paradise can be closely linked to the Pope's ideologies as outlined in this text. Like adopting God's vision of love in order to cultivate a loving relationship with the earth, the spirits present in Dante's paradise achieved salvation and true happiness. It at this point in his journey that Dante learns that God's love for his creation is the driving force of all movement and action in the universe and is the very essence of all things (Paradiso Canto I, lines 1-3). It is this very idea that Pope Francis hopes to magnify in the modern world. Christians are privy to such knowledge of love and conscientiousness being at the very core of our being and choosing to act on this knowledge would bring unmatched tranquility to the world. Dante states that yielding to the power of love irradiates the will for all other things (Paradiso Canto III, lines 70-73). This concept validates the Pope's thoughts that accepting and embracing fraternal love in the theological sense would transform the way people think and behave indefinitely. By modeling God's love for kin including nature, it would naturally become a standing element of societal practice. This concept of looking to God for guidance for purification and direction of will is also outlined in Dante's famous work. He states that purifying will in such a way is extremely difficult, and divine intervention and guidance is necessary (Paradiso Canto IV, line 86). It is without surprise that an answer to the current environmental crisis can be found by looking to our heavenly father, just as the same should be done in times of personal predicament as outlined in Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

Pope Francis's thoughts outlined in *Laudato Si* outlines that theological concepts and science are not mutually exclusive. Harboring a conversation concerning biodiversity in this text parallels with essential ideas of concern in environmental science. Our environmental indiscretions as a society have altered climate in such a way that certain species are biologically incapable to adapt and cease to exist. Living organisms are dependent on one another in ways that are not always obvious, and the survival of all of the Earth's species are of equal importance. This connection across species unifies us in a common purpose, much like the idea of the fraternity of God's creation summarized in Christian literature. There has been a call to action on behalf of many prominent figures in science to use the intellectual resources at our disposal to stop climate change in its tracks and reverse some of the damage our planet has suffered at the hands of humankind. This concept to use scientific efforts in such a way to protect the diminishing livelihood and diversity of living beings can most certainly be deduced to a labor of compassion. Certainly, scientists and engineers could continue as we were and explore uncharted scientific territories. However, are such advances significant if our home pays the price?

Themes of living in love and transforming the construct of society as a result are Christian ideals presented in section five, chapter six of *Laudato Si*. Adequately entitled "Civic and Political Love", Pope Francis utilizes the concept of living in unwavering compassion to offer a solution to our current climate crisis. He argues that individuals choosing to live in love will provide a united front capable of making meaningful changes in societal policies to combat climate change. Pope Francis's theories seamlessly encapsulates common Christian motifs present in the work of Dante Alighieri, Augustine's *Confessions* and the 1986 film *The Mission*. The commonplace of *Laudato Si* is not limited to the bounds of theology, and also has cohesive principles with modern environmental science. It is noteworthy that the effects of climate change

are universally detrimental to all living things and adopting a sense of steadfast empathy for living creatures may offer viable solutions to the current crisis.



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