

Pope Francis's Vision for Civic and Political Love in the Context of Care for our Common Home

Colin Dooley

[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.]

Many people in today's culture tend to use the word love very loosely without knowing how powerful the word actually is. Pope Francis tries to explain in *Laudato Si* that we need to love nature and our world just as much as we love others. He explains in paragraph 228 that "God is our common father therefore we are all brothers and sisters so the love that we give each other should be unconditional". Caring for nature on the other hand is not the same, to love the world around you, you need to go out of your way to pay attention to your actions. Pope Francis' vision in his letter is to encourage people to love everyone because in one way or another we are all related, he also wants to see people care and love their environment because it has been treated so poorly.

Being that I am a college student in today's current culture, especially as a freshman I have had the ability to witness and experience love from a very different perspective. What I mean by this is that I have seen friendly love between friends of the same and opposite sex, I have seen brotherly love, I have seen real love, and I have seen fake love; and all of them are very different. Love is really the strongest thing in the world, everyone needs to feel it because

with love you get happiness. Friendly love is equivalent to the love you have for each of the members of your friend group, it is also referred to as Philia. Brotherly love can be seen in different ways, one way is between true blood brothers where you would do anything in a heartbeat for them no matter what it was. It can also be seen on a team, I experienced this while playing rugby at The University of Scranton the only difference between the two is the fact that with one you are not related. This can be connected to Agape because the love is unconditional. The last two types of love that I have experienced while at school are real and fake love. Real love and fake love are the two most confusing loves, when you find real love with someone it is also known as Eros, but real love is often confused with fake love. This is because someone shows you the signs of love without really feeling it. While real romantic love can be seen as one of the best things in the world with the power it has, fake love can be the most destructive and leave the most scars. Pope Francis in his letter hints that he wants everyone to love each other, and by this he does not mean romantic love, obviously not fake love, he means Agape or unconditional love. I believe that he is trying to share this message because when you do not love someone that means that there is a part of you that is not willing to accept other people for who they are.

Along with love Pope Francis stressed care in his letter. This is because love and care go along with each other, and when they are used together, they become even stronger. When you love someone or something you generally care about it too, but when you pay attention and show how you care and put effort in the love between you and the person or the object becomes even greater. Care is different but not by much, this is because you can care about something but not love it. For example, if someone was not a big baseball fan but the New York Yankees were in

the World Series and they were from New York they would care about them winning, but they would not love that team. Over time when you begin to care more and more about someone or something you end up loving that specific thing or person which creates a special bond. It was very important that Pope Francis spoke about care because you cannot have love without care. In the Christian vision love and care are extremely important especially for the ecological challenges that the world is facing currently and in the future. I think the message that the Pope is trying to send is that everyone needs to be more present in themselves, by this I mean that we need to pay attention to what we do and make sure that we are not hurting the earth as much as we have. It almost seems as if he is trying to trick the people who aren't able to understand what he is saying, the main message that is clear is that he wants everyone to love everything but mainly he wants us to love each other and our planet. What I mean by tricking people is that if he can convince someone to love the earth, they will then subconsciously care about the earth without even knowing. Even if only one percent of the world's population decided that they were going to love the earth it would still be an amazing impact that I think Pope Francis would feel accomplished with the change he has made.

While reading section five Civic and Political Love I found it very compelling. One of the most interesting statements from this letter was what I had mentioned before from paragraph 228. Pope Francis states, "Jesus Reminded us that we have God as our common Father and that makes us brothers and sisters". This quote has stuck with me throughout the thought process and writing of this assignment. It puts into perspective that everyone on this earth is in one way related because even though we might practice different religions we all believe in the same God, and at one point he put two people on this earth to begin mankind. The second quote that I was

unable to forget is when Pope Francis says “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” at the beginning of paragraph 229. This quote is very compelling because it is easy for the fact that you can’t survive on your own to slip from your mind. It is very humbling when you think about that especially now during this quarantine because people have been realizing how much they take for granted. The example that I keep thinking of is hairdressers, I have seen hundreds of posts on social media about people trying to cut their hair and it always ends up with them shaving their head because they messed up. People don’t realize how much they need each other because no one can be efficient at every task in the world, and that is why people go to college and chose one thing to become a master of. The way that the world works is in my view similar to football, it is like a well-oiled machine when it is working right, but if a piece fall out then it won’t run as smoothly. For example, when the economy is falling then it impacts everyone in the country not just the businesses, or if the farmers experience a drought it doesn’t just affect them it affects the supermarkets ability to stock their shelves which then makes getting food more difficult.

Overall, the message that Pope Francis was trying to send was that the world needs love and care, and that as humans we all need each other. Pope Francis’s letter is very important and should really be heard around the world. If more people were able to understand that all you need to do in life is love everyone and everything, I think that we would see a very big shift in the way that people act and treat each other and their surroundings. We would see less littering and greener in fields and the more productive sea life, along with a greater overall morale.