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

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In a time of uncertainty, we see nations coming together to support the common good. Countries are facing a global pandemic with no end date thus causing massive disruption in the worldwide economy and social wellbeing of individuals. The world is coming together to lend medical supplies, offer support, and most importantly the attempt to develop a vaccine. In Pope Francis's text, *Laudato Si'*, the idea of civic and political love in "our common home," depicts the influence love can have on an individual. One cannot fully contribute to an activity without love; it is an essential emotion that guides one's actions in the world.

Pope Francis addresses the topic of civic and political love in chapter six, section five of *Laudato Si'*. Civic and political love encompasses the shared responsibilities everyone has for others and the world. Not only does one's actions affect themselves, but as an integral ecology, it impacts the universe. An integral ecology connects nature and society. One must demonstrate "care for nature [as it] 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’” (*Laudato Si’* 228). Pope Francis reminds us that God is our common Father, much like *Confessions* where Augustine believes God is the highest good. Parental figures are viewed as the highest good, therefore Augustine believes God is our common Father. In *Confessions*, Augustine states the “friendship between human beings is sweet in its cherished bond, because it creates unity out of many separate souls” (*Confessions* 2.10; Ruden, 43). Friendship gives us the tools to perfect love. Augustine is “sharing the way,” on his journey as he builds a relationship with God and discovers the values of love. The question of “where do I belong” helps one find where they fit in the world. Relationships are built from harmony. It unites nations and establishes fraternal love.

Nations share common responsibilities such as taking care of the environment to make the future better. These acts of love must be gratuitous according to Pope Francis. Gratuitous acts of love are uncalled for and consist of small gestures such as texting or calling a friend to check in on them. Loving our enemies is possible because of gratuitous love. As we saw in *Dante’s Divine Comedy*, Dante visits the city of Dis, consisting of the sixth and lower circles of hell. Enclosed within walls are the souls of sinners who committed sins of violence and bestiality, and fraud and malice (Alighieri 94). A lack of love causes evil; one needs nurturing to instill positive aspects of love. Without love, one holds evil in their souls. Love is naturally formed, much like the wind is natural. Love forms when it is least expected.

As a Girl Scout, I value Pope Francis's idea of “universal fraternity” because everyone is a brother and sister to each other in “our common home.” Girl Scouts make a promise “to serve God and my [their] country, to help people at all times” (“About Girl Scouts - Who We Are”).

Despite this promise, our throwaway culture continues to violate this principle because people are wasteful. When God created the Earth, he had visions of everyone working together. While not everyone in the universe is or was a Girl Scout, this promise pertains to everyone. Everyone has an innate responsibility to take care of the Earth. When you live on this planet, everyone inherently makes a promise to care for the Earth to benefit people now and in the future. Because of moral values, people are raised to maintain their promises and are looked down upon if they break their promises. Everyone has morals they must live up to and the promise to take care of people is essential for a functional world.

To overcome adversity, one needs one another for support. When you love someone, you overlook their shortcomings and accept them for who they are. Adversity must be overcome as “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” (*Laudato Si'* 229). Pope Francis calls out the entire universe for its “mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty,” calling for change (*Laudato Si'* 229). In *The Divine Comedy*, the light of God is a “natural love [that] may never fall to error ... but when it turns to evil, or shows more or less zeal than it ought for what is good, then the creature turns on its creator” (Alighieri 429). Love urges Dante on his journey and is a powerful motivator to greatness. Dante is being guided by the light, which is from God. This allows him to experience change that will teach him love. God is the guiding figure for happiness and will redirect souls whose love turns bad.

In society, bad love has been caused by a throwaway culture. Pope Francis believes that a throwaway culture is linked to pollution and waste. Immediate gratification has only influenced the rapid development of the culture we live in today. The desire for the newest technology and wasteful habits have caused a downfall in society. Implementing small changes such as using reusable bags or a reusable water bottle instead of a plastic water bottle can change the culture. Individuals need to be thorough with their actions as everyone's actions have consequences. Good love is replaced with bad love "when the foundations of social life are corroded," such as feelings of immediate gratification destroy the foundational units of appreciation for one another (*Laudato Si'* 229). For example, in *The Mission*, the Spanish use forms of violence to eradicate the Guarani and the Jesuits as they refuse to obey orders (*The Mission*). The Guarani and Jesuits had developed respect and love for one another yet brutality by the Spanish resulted in a massacre of almost the entire native population.

As we gain a better understanding of civic and political love, small gestures of love can make a significant impact on our lives. Little ways of love can make a big difference, "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 shows 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" (*Laudato Si'* 230). Unintended actions can have unintended consequences. For example, my sister and I sent a care package to our family friends with shirts from our respective colleges. We sent this package at the beginning of the pandemic, and we did not realize the positive effects of our actions. In these unsettling times, acts of thoughtfulness such as sending a package can bring a great deal of happiness into one's life. Our family friends told my sister and

I, they were giddy while opening the box because it was something upbeat and joyful that brightened their day. A small gesture of kindness can bring positivity to one's life. Kindness is not measured in a specific manner, rather acts of kindness that comes from the heart matter most.

It is important to tell others you love them daily because it creates care for one another. This notion establishes the idea of *Cura Personalis*, “care for the entire person,” an important Jesuit motto (The University of Scranton). *Cura Personalis* emphasizes the idea of helping others. In times of need, much like in the current situation of the world, people are coming together to provide support and show unity. Small gestures of love make an individual feel valued, “love, [is] 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” (*Laudato Si’* 231). One graduates college to use their degree to help others. As an exercise science major at Scranton, PCPS is “set apart by their

commitment to service, devotion to the Ignatian qualities of care for one other and concern for those less fortunate and provide a critical and compassionate appreciation of the role of civic engagement” (The University of Scranton). The college in which my major is based has values of love. Love is a foundational unit that drives one's motivation. If I did not love my major, I would not have the desire to learn and thus would “throwaway” thousands of dollars on an education that provided no satisfaction.

Social love is another driving factor for love. The desire for acceptance in society allows us to feel worthy and important in the universe. Having a “culture of care” is important for a successful society. In *The Mission*, the Guarani and the Jesuits fought back against the Spanish’s order to enslave the Guarani. The joining of forces between the Guarani and the Jesuits showed the love between one another. Father Gabriel states, “Jesuits promise life to God, and God is love,” the Jesuits spread Christianity in the village, but they also found love (*The Mission*). A “culture of care” between two groups unites the world and brings nations together.

Every individual is unique and important for a functioning society, “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 that 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 that God has entrusted to us. These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences” (*Laudato Si’* 232). Everyone makes an impact in the world; some more noticeable than others. An individual may impact only one person but leave lasting impressions with that individual. As love expands, it builds a community. Community is built upon relationships of caring acts that benefit the universe. Learning to love is an important aspect of society.

Consumerism leads to a throwaway culture. A throwaway culture negatively impacts the world, if “we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God’s expectations” (*Laudato Si’* 61). God has trusted us to take care of the world we live in. We have been given the responsibility to take care of the environment in “our common home” which promotes the wellbeing of nature. Humans are at the root of the ecological crisis; we need to slow down and look at reality in a different light to protect our future. Through texts of *Laudato Si’*, *The Divine Comedy* and *Confessions*, the idea that God is the highest of all loves and is a father figure for many is depicted. Pope Francis has explained the importance of civic and political love in terms of God, it is now our turn to make an impact with what we have learned.

Pope Francis has connected civic and political love in our universe. The ideas of caring for Earth and the growing culture change which has brought about the throwaway culture in today's society are ecological issues the world is faced with. It is “suggest[ed] that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbor and with the Earth itself” (*Laudato Si’* 66). These relationships create the foundation of the world we all share, creating a fraternity bound between one another. If one cannot fully

contribute to something, there is no love. Love is an essential emotion that acts as a connecting tool between God, our neighbors, and Earth.

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