

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

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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 message from "Civic and Political Love" in section five, chapter six of *Laudato Si'* conveys the necessity of first acknowledging our common home in order to connect love and care to the environment that God has entrusted upon His people. The Pope's vision reflects the theme of Love and the City as seen through other resources, such as Augustine's *Confession*, *The Secret of Kells*, *The Mission*, and *The Divine Comedy*, as civic and political love expose the solidarity within a city, the shared responsibility, and the presence of ordered love that all individuals can strive towards. Furthermore, this vision of care and love applied to our common home connects to my aspiration of becoming a middle level educator, as I can live out and pass on the vision of the Pope through my students. Through *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis

utilizes a Christian viewpoint in addressing the shared responsibilities in a contemporary society to practice civic and political love, making Love and the City applicable to all individuals.

Section five, chapter six of *Laudato Si'* instills the idea that all individuals are called to a “shared responsibility” not only to each other, but also to the “world” (*Laudato Si'*, par. 229). Being that individuals share a “common Father,” they are “brothers and sisters” that must adopt a lifestyle of “genuine culture” that cares for the environment (*Laudato Si'*, par. 228, 229). In doing so, a connection between Christian love and care can develop, highlighting the theme of Love and the City, as love between brothers and sisters that is then translated into care in the city. The Pope proposes that we attend to our challenges, whether they be social, cultural, economic, or ecological, by starting with love and “simple daily gestures” (*Laudato Si'*, par. 230). Doing so will “build a better world,” in both the civic and political realm (*Laudato Si'*, par. 231). The Pope makes his vision compelling as he addresses the fact that not all individuals are called to the political life, but they can demonstrate their love through different means and gestures in order to “break out of the indifference” (*Laudato Si'*, par. 232). The Pope instills a sense of “solidarity” in one’s city, solidifying the study of Love and the City sparked from previous resources.

Augustine presents the idea of Love and the City by defining a city as “an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by a common agreement as to the objects of their Love” (*The City of God*, 14.28). Augustine personifies a city, reestablishing the humanity within it, and depicting that solidarity Pope Francis calls for. Augustine details his story of Catholic fundamentals, growing from sin to salvation. In doing so, he acknowledges his mistake when he “turned against many things” that God made, admitting that he “wasn’t right in the head” (*Conf.* 7.20). Here, Augustine began to recognize the truth in God’s creations. Augustine learned to

readjust his object of love towards God and His creations, rather than romantic love with others. Augustine's struggles can be connected to social or cultural struggles some may experience in society, as they may feel pressured or swayed to express their love in ways that stray from the civic and political realm. If other individuals readjust the focus of their love as Augustine did, they can become "bound together," living out his definition of a city, and focus on the "common home" that Pope Francis depicts (*Laudato Si'*, par. 232). However, one cannot come to agreement in their common home without the presence of God, as the human heart "is restless until it rests in thee" (*Conf.* 1.1.1). Therefore, Augustine reiterates the notion of all beings as "brothers and sisters" as Pope Francis states, our necessity to recognize God and his creations in the city, and the care that results from a focused love (*Laudato Si'*, par. 228).

The Pope reminds individuals of the shared responsibility they have and how practicing this responsibility will lead to care and love for the environment as well. The idea of responsibility and connection to the environment is seen through both *The Secret of Kells* and *The Mission*. *The Secret of Kells* evokes elaborate imagery and music to portray Brendan's enlightening journey that connects him more with the natural world, despite Abbot Cellach's disapproval. With Brother Aidan's encouragement, Brendan travels to the forest in search of berries to create emerald ink. This journey allows Brendan "to learn more in the woods from trees and rocks than in any other place" (*The Secret of Kells*). The care put into the creation of the manuscript in *The Secret of Kells* conveys the bond between the spiritual and environment that the Pope calls us towards. *The Mission* asserts a similar message through the transformation of Rodrigo's character with the guidance of Father Gabriel, sparking Rodrigo's "spiritual journey" (Guhin, 2017). Although Cardinal Altamirano makes the final decision that the mission must be abandoned and the Guarani must relocate, he too is moved by the solidarity presented

through Father Gabriel and Rodrigo, as he admits “A surgeon, to save the body, must often hack off a limb. But in truth nothing had prepared me for the beauty and the power of the limb that I had come here to sever” (*The Mission*, 1:05:59- 1:06:16). Rodrigo embodies the shared responsibility the Pope stresses in his message. He redirects his love as Augustine did, “put aside childish things,” and makes a connection between the spiritual and the environment, similar to Brendan’s character (1 Corinthians 13:11). He lives out the fact that without love, “I am nothing” (1 Corinthians 13:2). Rodrigo displays a “love for society and commitment to the common good,” which are “outstanding expressions of a charity which affects not only relationships between individuals but also ‘macro-relationships, social, economic, and political ones’” (*Laudato Si’*, par. 231).

Lastly, *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri advances the theme of Love and the City. As Dante journeys through the *Inferno*, or hell, *Purgatorio*, or purgatory, and *Paradiso*, or heaven, different “cities” can be analyzed that correlate to Augustine’s definition of a city. This definition of a city focuses more on the love of individuals in the city rather than physical characteristics of the city itself. Dante distinguishes between cities that practice ordered and disordered love, as prideful cities practice disordered love. This disordered love is first found in the city of “Dis,” the capital of Hell, with its “uneven tombs,” “great fires,” and “red heat” (*Inferno*, 9.114, 115). The next city is the Earthly Garden, where Dante recognizes his sin of indulging in his temptations after Beatrice’s death, similar to how Eve gave into her temptation eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Love is not ordered until Dante reaches the Heavenly City of Jerusalem, depicted as the Mystic Rose. This city is located in *Paradiso*, indicating a fulfillment of love that was not attainable elsewhere. In the presence of this beauty of the city, Dante feels “amazement,” “stupor,” “new-found joy,” and “bliss” that was unmatched to any

other city (Paradiso, 31. 40-43). Dante has completed his journey from hell to heaven, discovering in the Mystic Rose the ultimate relationship between love and cities. Here, Dante is exposed to a form of agape that was not previously possible. In responding to this agape, Dante's would now be equipped to share it with others (Lewis). Sharing this new love with others and connecting it to care with our brothers and sisters mirror Pope Francis's appeal, as a shared responsibility for the environment cannot be built on a foundation of disordered love. An ordered love, depicted at the Mystic Rose, can flourish into the civic and political love the environment requires.

Reading Pope Francis's message in conjunction with the resources mentioned allows one to first recognize the solidarity within their city, or common home, through Augustine's *Confessions*. Next, an understanding of love and care, which then connects to a responsibility to the environment, is reached through *The Secret of Kells* and *The Mission*. Lastly, the achievement of ordered love that translates into civic and political love is grasped through *The Divine Comedy*. This knowledge, coupled with Christian faith, allows one to overcome challenges in their common home when practicing care and love. After all, "cities occupy just one to three percent of the Earth's surface and yet are home to nearly four billion people," emphasizing the multitude of brothers and sisters one can connect with in order to demonstrate civic and political love (*An Ecomodernist Manifesto*). However, this task may be easier said than done. In response to this tall order, Pope Francis addresses ways in which the practice of "social love" can be reached in one's daily life, making his proposal more compelling (*Laudato Si'*, par. 231). In order to release a love that is "civic and political," all one has to do is "simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness" (*Laudato Si'*, par. 230). The Pope understands that not everyone can join a mission with the Guarani people

depicted in *The Mission* and the political life does not appeal to all. Instead, one can join “organizations which work to promote the common good and to defend the environment” (*Laudato Si'*, par. 232). The Pope redefines “civic and political” through a Catholic vision, making it attainable by all, as it grows from care and love. Individuals can show “concern for a public place” by restoring and beautifying it (*Laudato Si'*, par. 232). Small gestures and greater focus on civic and political life are becoming more relevant, not only because this week happens to be the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, but also due to the current COVID-19 lockdown. A DJ hosting a “porch party” for neighbors, encouraging chalk art on sidewalks in Queens, and “floral installations” on the streets of Manhattan are all examples of small acts that demonstrate love during a pandemic (NY1, Eyewitness News). The Pope explains that “These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences” (*Laudato Si'*, par. 232). Pope Francis is referring to another fundamental here, the one of self-giving love, which I studied in previous theology courses. This fundamental alludes to Jesus’ death on the cross as the ultimate image of self-giving love, encouraging individuals to “humbly regard others as more important than yourselves” (Philippians 2: 3-4). Recalling this fundamental, along with faith and salvation, leads individuals towards greater care and love that is essential during a pandemic.

Pope Francis’s connection between care and love, translated into civic and political life, along with the resources from this semester, allows me to apply the Pope’s message to my future career in middle level education and special education. Education was a career path I wanted to pursue from a young age due to my positive school experiences and the impact knowledge can have on a student. Now, my choice of education fulfills a “gesture” that Pope Francis asks for, as my future job embodies an example of an everyday act the Pope encourages (*Laudato Si'*, par.

230). I can demonstrate a connection between love and care while engaging students in their community, or common home. From my education classes, I learned how lesson plans and field trips can utilize resources from their community as they become immersed in the love in their own city. For example, cleaning up trash at a beach can connect to a science lesson plan while also encouraging my students to perform a gesture that promotes common good. I will strive towards teaching a “culture of care” and spark a domino effect in which this care spreads from the student, to their families, and then into their cities (*Laudato Si'*, par. 231). By acting on my responsibility towards our common home, I hope to inspire students to do the same.

Displaying civic and political love may seem like an overwhelming task at first, but Pope Francis’s explanation, along with understanding of resources such as Augustine’s *Confessions*, *The Secret of Kells*, *The Mission*, and *The Divine Comedy*, provide a means through which one can connect their love with others, pour care into their city, and better their common home. Everyday gestures aid in creating a more active culture towards the common good. My aspirations of becoming an educator allows me to live out Pope Francis’s message and inspire others to do the same. Pope Francis instills not only a sense of responsibility in individuals, but also a sense of hope towards the future of their common home.

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