

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

[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.

Laudato Si is a letter by Pope Francis addressing the cultural crisis going on in the world. Humans now are dealing with a plethora of problems related to the earth, and it is due to our own carelessness. Pope Francis calls us as Christians to make a difference in our lifestyle in order to save the planet that God made for us. In section five, chapter six of *Laudato Si* titled, “Civic and Political Love,” Pope Francis emphasizes a ‘less is more’ ideal. He thinks that the key to fixing the cultural crisis is educational training. Pope Francis talks about love throughout the entire letter, but in this chapter, he says that “love... is also civic and political” (*Laudato Si*, 231). What he means by this is that individuals making change is not quite enough; people in higher governmental positions need to provide education on the problems in the world, and therefore make a change. Without this, the impact will never truly make the change that the planet needs from us.

According to Augustine’s *City of God*, a city is defined as, “an assemblage of reasonable beings bound together by their objects of love” (*City of God*, 19.24). This definition fits very well with Pope Francis’ letter. He feels that our entire Earth is considered a city because we are all bound together by God’s love for us. This is why he feels so strongly that this cultural crisis we are in is our responsibility. We are dealing with severe issues like pollution, deforestation,

climate change, depletion of natural resources, and the increasing gap between the rich and poor. In chapter one Pope Francis strives to not place blame, but rather, "turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it" (*Laudato Si*, 19). We as a city have to work together to undo our bad work and help God's creation get back to the way it was meant to be in the first place.

Pope Francis' ideas are rooted deeply in traditional Christian ideals; mainly the belief that God himself is love. Christians therefore want to imitate Jesus and God because they too want to become love and be loved. They have a specific image of God and by imitating Him, they grow into their image of Him and reflect what they feel that is. Pope Francis believes in this, and this is why he emphasizes that humans need to grow into their image of God more and connect with the Earth. There needs to be a connection between humans and the earth because without it, we get to the point that we are now. A point where we stop loving the earth like it is God's creation and stop caring for it and we are left with what seems like unsolvable environmental and cultural problems. We must not ignore the natural world; we have to attend to it and give it the love that God meant for it to get.

Very similar ideals about humans and their environment are portrayed in a movie titled, *Secret of the Kells*. This movie is about a city of people in the woods in Ireland who are preparing for an attack by a group of Vikings. A young boy named Brendan who has no interest in battle whatsoever, ends up working with Aidan, an illuminator. Together, the two of them work on dangerous magical tasks in order to save their city and reconnect with the forest that no one is allowed in. There is a shape shifting creature in the story whose name is Aisling. She teaches Brendan all about her forest and why it has to be taken care of. She knows every detail about it and shows him the ropes. Brendan gains a new appreciation for the nature and beauty of

the forest because he has been behind his city's walls for such a long amount of time. Because of his new relationship with nature (the forest) and his ability to navigate it, he is able to complete the Book of Kells and save his city after the attack of the Vikings. This is very similar to what Pope Francis is trying to convey. We have to regain our connection with nature and the earth in order to save it.

We often forget how much the earth actually gives to us which is why we under appreciate it at times. It has given us all of our natural resources that we take for granted. For example, it has given us light, air, water, plants, animals, soil, stone, minerals, fossil fuels and more. We do not go a single day without using one or if not more of these. In order to see and be warm in our homes we need light and fossil fuels. Not only do we use these things themselves, but they also are made into other materials that we use every day. Our musical instruments, art supplies, clothing, electrical equipment, jewelry, and so much more are all made from these natural resources that the earth gives us. God made the earth with so much love that it gives us so much more it appears to, and we use them much more than we realize. Especially during a pandemic like now, we are relying on these tools that the earth gives us. We are always in our home relying on our lighting, our wireless internet, listening to music, and experiencing art. We are working together as a city and doing our own part to help the situation and overcome it. During this time, we are now appreciating the music and art that is keeping us entertained in our home. All of that was provided to us by the earth and God himself. Without these things, we would not be able to successfully stay in our homes and slow the spread of the virus. Art and music are extremely important. Art, music, poetry and much more has influenced many works that are still famous today, including Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. Philosophers and artists that he read about and saw influenced his work and impacted the final outcome of the book.

Overall, the world impacts us in so many ways and gives us so much. It truly is our duty to fight to protect the earth. Whether it is through education for others, or voting for the things that are right, we have to do our individual part to help save the earth from the issues that are at hand. Not only do we have to save it, but we have to enjoy the things it has to offer more. In chapter 6 of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis emphasizes the ‘less is more’ ideal and we really should be following it. Recognizing the gifts of creation as we go about our days is important to form our “culture of care” that Pope Francis is talking about (*Laudato Si*, 231). We must implement our Christian ideals imitating God and being thankful for his creations in order to better appreciate our earth and protect it from further damage.