

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

[Shane Maurer](#)

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Pope Francis wrote *Laudato Si* as a guide for readers in the twenty-first century to use when studying our world's current problems and vices. Throughout his letters, he touches on various topics that are currently being debated in society. He brings up the various environmental and societal impacts of our habits such as polluting, technology, and consumerism. These various aspects of our culture have caused humanity much harm; Pope Francis sees through the maltreatment of our world and makes us analyze how we can make a change to better it. In this paper, the topic of civic and political love from Pope Francis's *Laudato Si* will be discussed and how we can use his writings to change our current habits. This paper will not only analyze Pope Francis's writings, but will make connections to the writings of Dante and Augustine. Using these outside readings, their relationships to Pope Francis's teachings will be made along with personal connections to the material. Francis's vision is to have a society where people remove themselves from prejudice and material pleasures to work communally and solve our world's problems. Writings from Augustine are closely related to Pope Francis's idea of self-analysis in his opening statements in chapter six of *Laudato Si*, section five titled civic and political love.

Saint Augustine's life story is described extensively in his *Confessions* writings. Here, he describes his life along with his misfortunes and his vices. At an early age, Augustine wrote how he viewed people during his life, specifically in book three while he was staying in Carthage. An interesting point he makes is when he states "The blindness of humanity is so great that people are actually proud of their blindness" (Chadwick, 38). Pope Francis writes in his opening section

of civic and political love how the world was rampant with immorality and harshness. He writes, “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 lighthearted superficiality has done us no good” (Laudato Si, 229). Both Augustine and Francis understand that people are not acknowledging their negative actions, resulting in the harm of others. These are both interesting perspectives, they both point out the lack of love in our current society. Many people are focused on their own personal gain, Augustine and Francis have clearly identified that this is not how we can better ourselves for the good. Instead, we should accept our negative qualities and vices and learn how to focus on our good ones.

Augustine makes another criticism of people and himself, he states “Iniquity lies to itself, when men either corrupt or pervert their own nature which you made and ordered, or when people immoderately use what is allowed, or when, turning to what is forbidden, they indulge a burning lust for that which is contrary to nature” (Chadwick, 47). This is related to Pope Francis’s idea of being true, kind, and loving others as God does. By not loving others, people are going against what God has made and the core Christian belief of loving all of God’s creation. Francis states, “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” (Laudato Si, 228). Pope Francis’s vision closely relates to the writings of Augustine by stating how we must love everyone and everything; not participating in unconditional love for beings on earth results in a “burning lust for that which is contrary to nature” (Chadwick, 47).

A point that Pope Francis makes in civic and political love is “Saint Teresa of Lisieux invites us to practice the little way of love, not to miss out on the kind word, a smile or any small

gesture which sows peace and friendship” (Laudato Si, 230). Here, he is encouraging the reader to start small, change something in your daily routine that will brighten another person’s day. It can be as simple as a smile, holding the door open for someone, or giving a complement to a friend or family member. According to Pope Francis, using these simple techniques in our own lives can help improve our societies concept and understanding of love through action. This is compelling because often times, people are too caught up in finding immediate solutions and solving a problem that may be too large; by beginning small, it can lead to greater changes over time.

Personally, any time someone complements me or shows a small gesture of peace improves my current mood, making me feel better throughout the day. If people acted like this towards others, our current political and civil atmosphere will completely change. When someone shows a genuine concern for others or, like Pope Francis says, shows a sign of peace and friendship; people will be more compassionate and less selfish. I know that if someone does something kind for me, I immediately want to help that person or show appreciation. The more people show kindness, the likelihood that other will want to reciprocate that kind act is greatly increased, resulting in more people being kind to others. While this idea has relatively small effects at first, Pope Francis states, “Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of charity which effects not only relationships between individuals but also macro-relationships, social, economic and political ones” (Laudato Si, 231). He is showing people how these small gestures can have greater impacts on our current political climate. Respecting others and loving others no matter what their background is relates back to the Christians idea of loving everyone and everything god has created.

While Pope Francis's writings discuss the positive implications of changing our current ways, Dante's *Divine Comedy* teaches us that people have the chance to change in the eyes of god. While Dante and Virgil are moving through purgatory in Dante's *Purgatorio*, they come across people who were deemed as gluttons in their past life. These people were emaciated, they were constantly hungry and craving fruit from a tree that was in view, but could not eat it. This was their penance and would eventually reach paradise but had to give up their love for earthly pleasures (Digital Dante, Columbia.edu). Pope Francis believes that there is hope for humanity in these trying times, that we can change our ways and love one another without worrying about earthly pleasures, like the people in purgatory in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The people stuck in purgatory that were gluttons is related to when Pope Francis discusses how over consumption of anything is an absence of love for one another and the world. He states "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). People that over consume various things, such as food, are not only harming themselves, but are going to be removing resources from people that may need it desperately. Francis's idea of limiting consumption on all levels ties into this part of purgatory in Dante's *Divine Comedy* because both outline the effects of over-consumption on a spiritual level.

Dante's *purgatorio* provides a great story of how people can change, that there is hope for salvation. Another way Pope Francis's letter tie into course material is through *The Mission* movie. A great example of how *The Mission* movie ties into Pope Francis writings is the service aspect of the film. Throughout *Laudato Si* he discusses how we as a society can collectively help others with problems such as pollution, providing clean water, and garbage removal around the world. In *The Mission*, the movie follows a Jesuit priest and his efforts to create a catholic mission in the South American jungles. In the Jungle, the native tribe and the Jesuits are able to

create a church and an overall cleaner village. Also, the natives adopt the Christian beliefs of the Jesuits. This movie connects to Pope Francis's idea of "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" (Laudato Si, 232). Both the villagers and the Jesuits worked together to achieve a common goal, in this case, defending their home. It relates to Pope Francis's idea of how there are organizations in society that promote the common good. In *the Mission*, the Jesuits represent the group of people who are trying to promote good throughout the world, something that we can use when trying to promote good in our own lives. We can learn from both Pope Francis and the Jesuits from the film; each believe that we must defend the good on earth from those that want to take it away.

Pope Francis touches on community efforts, talking about how "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"(Laudato Si, 232). It is important that people show love for our natural world, they can do that by exposing themselves more to the outdoor activities which can help "relationships develop or recover and a new social fabric emerges" (Laudato Si, 232). An example could be the community effort of helping maintain parks promotes community engagement. The more people engage in the community, the more likely that their voices will be heard on a political level. For example, if the community works together to create a park, they will work with mayors and other officials to ensure the park is safe and clean. "This process results in informed and engaged residents that fell better connected to their communities" (Brec.org). Communities that work together on a small level, such as managing a local park, are likely to be heard by political leaders who will listen to their opinions and implement new policies in favor of those opinions.

This connects to Francis's idea of civic and political love by working together to reach a common goal for the good of the people when he writes "These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences" (Laudato Si, 232).

Community engagement is an essential way for people to work together for a common good. A perfect example of community engagement would be raising money for charity. By raising money for some charity, showing selfless giving to those in need. While in high school, I was able to participate in Relay for Life, an event where various teams raise money for those affected by cancer. This is one example where a community comes together to help those in need, sharing a common goal of raising as much money as possible for cancer patients. Something that I thought related to my experience and what Pope Francis talks about in civic and political love is when he says, "In this way, the world, and the quality of life if 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 us" (Laudato Si, 232). What he means by this is that by caring for those that cannot care for themselves, we are forming a closer bond with god. While raising money for cancer patients, myself and my teammates felt connected to those that were suffering and we all felt we were helping ease their financial struggle. Francis goes on and says "These community actions, when they express self-giving love, can also become intense spiritual experiences" (Laudato Si, 232). I can attest that giving and helping others brings people together, especially helping those that need our help the most.

Laudato Si reveals to us how we can overcome the various challenges that we face in our everyday lives. In the section civic and political love, he discusses how we can all practice this type of love in small ways. We can smile at others, get involved with our communities, and analyze our strengths and weaknesses so that we can positively give back to our society. Francis

believes that we all should work together to reach a common good in our communities, this can only start with individuals participating in acts of kindness.

Works Cited

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