

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

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Throughout the course of this Spring semester, in Theology class we have looked at many sacred texts and saw various films regarding different religious beliefs, all of which can be classified under one common theme: Love. We see love in *The Divine Comedy*, *Confessions*, *The Secret of the Kells*, *The Mission*, and *Laudato Si*, but all focus around a different type of love, even though they are all important in their own regard. In some cases, we see the love someone has for their family, but in others we can see the love someone has for the environment, their religion, or the well being of other people. In every situation, though, love is the driver of the main story and will keep constant through our theme of Love and the City.

In chapters 5 and 6 of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis talks about “Civic and Political Love”, which is our duty to care for not only ourselves, but everything else that surrounds us. The Pope, in his opening statement in chapter 5, says “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 his brothers and sisters...” (*Si* par.228). Instantly upon reading this, I thought of our viewing of the *Secret of the Kells*. In the movie, a young boy is tasked with completing the Book of Kells, and along the way meets a girl who is intertwined with nature, and they feed off each other's relationships. The Pope often puts emphasis on care for the environment, and in the movie a young woman named Aisling represents that care. She oversees helping young Brendan through the woods and guiding him on his journey towards the completion of the book, which in turn would help protect the woods by shooing away any unwanted guests.

Another example of this “love” shared between Aisling and Brendan is also shown in the film *The Mission*. The Pope states that “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 immortality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty” (p.229). As we see in *The Mission*, a tribe of native Indians are threatened by European conquistadors, who challenge the tribe and the Jesuits who live there to enslave the Indians for personal profit. The Jesuits, on the other hand, spread the good word of the Lord to these Indians, and teach them how to read, how to speak the words of the bible, and teach them more crafty things such as wood working or music playing. Here, the Jesuit mission is following the words of Pope Francis, as they are taking an active role in seeing that not only the Indians are taken care of, but the environment around them is kept sacred and unadulterated by crusading Europeans. What ensues is an ugly slaughter, both of the Jesuits and the Indians, but faith never dwindled among the tribe, even as their churches went up in flames and their people were shot and killed. To these people, the Pope says “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” (p.229). It is a shame what happened to the

protagonists in *The Mission*, but the movie serves as a teaching tool, and tells us viewers that loving, in the end, is the best thing we can do.

The Pope's words of love are also rung throughout *Confessions* as well. In this sacred text, the story of St. Augustine is told, and how he perseveres through human desires and bodily obstacles in the quest of reaching God. The Pope says that "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 sow's 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." (p.230). That final part of "exacerbated consumption" is something not only St. Augustine can relate to, but all humans as well. For St. Augustine, this consumption is mostly sexual, as shown in *Confessions* when he says "I caught the flame of desire to glut myself on the pit of hell, and recklessly grew a whole grove of shady love affairs, several species of them" (II,I,11). As a young person, Augustine was a "slave" to his sexual desires, and through his journey towards finding God he had enlightenment on this fact and sought to better himself. During this pandemic, I, along with many other people just like me, are found in a very unsettling spot, and some of the only things we can find comfort in are those things that we know are there for us: Junk Food, Video Games, playing on our phones, whatever the case may be. We are slowly becoming slaves to these things, as everyday we continue to sit in our homes is another day, we are tempted by these things that bind us. Gluttony is something that affects everyone, and through the Pope we learn that it is one of the reasons why people are so mistreated, and that is a confirmed fact. You mistreat yourself when you eat everything in sight, and we as people mistreat the poor and hungry when we take the food from stores and farms and do not allow them to have any. Enough food is produced every year to end world hunger, but does that seem to be the issue? No. The issues lie in the people who can make these contributions, but do not because of "Supply and Demand". While it would be costly to distribute such large amounts of food on a global scale, people can make smaller contributions which could have the same effect. Remember the Pope's words:" 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" .... 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." (p.231). Here, the Pope reiterates the idea that small gestures added up across everyone who chooses to make a difference will have a lasting impact on society's well-being, not only because it is the right thing to do, but people who are helped often have urges to help themselves, meaning that if we are somehow able to help the less fortunate across the globe, then we can focus on bigger issues like the environment together.

Although the messages in *Laudato Si* are not like those in our next reading, we can still find themes of love and the environment in *The Divine Comedy*. This is the story of Dante Alighieri, and his travel through the Inferno (Hell), The Purgatorio (purgatory), and the Paradiso (Heaven). Along the way, he and his guide, Virgil, meet many kinds of sinners, and eventually

Beatrice, Dante's ideal woman, takes over the trip and guides Dante through Heaven. Throughout their stay in Hell, Dante and Virgil approach the city of Dis, which contains people who put good morals in danger, and "did violence to God by denying immortality (*Comedy* 74). These people actively went against the words of Pope Francis and committed sins that could not be overlooked. Dante and Virgil's journey in Hell can best be described by a passage written by the Pope towards the end of chapter 5, when he says "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" (p.231). Dante and Virgil essentially are using their passage through Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven to not only see for themselves what the afterlife is like, but to also enrich their spirituality as well, as well as the spirituality of whoever shall read the book. Feeling the call of God is something everyone may encounter, and it is at this point someone can choose to either respond to the call or ignore it. For these people in Hell, they clearly chose to ignore God, which is their cause of being in Hell. In contrast, choosing to listen to God and live a good life will not just lift your soul, but the souls of those you can help after reaching out to God.

The theme of love throughout chapters 5 and 6 of *Laudato Si* are not just applicable to the materials I have been provided from my Christian theology class. There are many other areas of my education where I deal with "loving" situations. I am a Finance major at the University, and often we focus on economics, accounting, and investing without really focusing in on what those mean to real people. What do I mean when I say this? Take for example what the Pope says in chapter 6 of *Laudato Si*, "Saint John of the Cross taught that all the goodness present in the realities and experiences of this world 'is present in God eminently and infinitely, or more properly, in each of these sublime realities is God. This is not because the finite things of this world are really divine, but because the mystic experiences the intimate connection between God and all beings, and thus feels that 'all things are God'" (p.234). What St. John is saying here is to find God in all things, because he exists in all things, and is a part of our reality. Does this mean God is in economics, accounting, and investing as I have previously mentioned? Yes. Through business classes offered at the University, one of the first things you are taught, primarily in finance, is that the sole purpose of an owner is to return a profit to its shareholders. This means that profit is more sought after than good moral standing, charitable donations, etc. God being in these fields of study means that he is watching our ethical behaviors, and we must decide whether to follow in his light. Many corporations pollute our oceans, rivers, and lakes with waste that they choose to not spend extra money properly disposing of, resulting in the deaths of millions of fish and, in some extreme scenarios, the extinction of some sea life. Who can forget the Exxon and British Petroleum oil spills, the fallout from which is STILL being dealt with today? Instead, we must change our ways and listen to God and aid him in caring for our planet, because we only get one chance. We know from reading *Laudato Si* that those who are affected the greatest by ecological disasters are the poor, because they cannot seek shelter or provide for their loved ones like others can. In closing, the Pope says "Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane. Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise. The hand that blesses is an instrument of God's love and a reflection of the closeness of Jesus Christ, who came to accompany us on the journey of life. Water poured over the body of a child in Baptism is a sign of new life.

Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning our back on nature” (p.235). These powerful words spoken by Pope Francis indicate that just because you find God and have embraced your spirituality, it does not mean you should allow yourself to ignore your Christian duty of caring for the poor and for the environment.

In conclusion, what can be said about love and the teachings of Pope Francis? In each example from Christian Theology class, we see that there is a shared love between the protagonist and their situation, keeping in mind that although this love is different in every case, it still surrounds God and his wisdom. Being fortunate enough to attain a liberal arts education from such a fine school, many of the Pope’s teachings in *Laudato Si* are very applicable to me, and I will carry these words with me for the rest of my life. The Pope wished that all of us give whatever contributions we can towards protecting and saving the environment, because all of us humans share this planet together, and being unified in saving it encompasses what “Care for our common home” is all about.

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