

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

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Throughout the semester, our class discussed several works that portray the theme “love in the city.” Dante Aligheri’s *Divine Comedy* reveals that all people can embrace God’s love, even those who commit great sins against God and face banishment to the circles of Hell. Continuing further into the semester, we touched upon the meaning of community and how helping one another advances society, as depicted in *The Mission*. Finally, the encyclical text of *Laudato Si* promotes love and community in communion to advance society for the common good through civic and political love. So, what does Pope Francis mean when he discusses the value of civic and political love among the place considered to be “our common home” (*Laudato Si*, Par. 17)? Throughout the text, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis teaches his audience about the importance of cultivating what God has created for us and abolishing the maladaptive habit of what he describes as “throwaway culture” (*Laudato Si*, Par 22). Ignorance and neglect of our Earth could be detrimental to our common ground and may even lead to our extinction. Additionally, he enforces the idea of unifying the community to grow and love one another, which is what Pope Francis would describe as civic love. In Chapter 6 Section 5 of *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis discusses the influence of civic and political love on the world. He emphasizes how it can cause the human race to love one another and love what we know as our common home, creating a better world.

Pope Francis states that “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 means of repaying others for what they have done or what they will do for us. This is why it is possible to love our enemies” (Laudato Si, Par. 228). In saying this, the Pope introduces the idea of universal love, no matter the circumstance. Love is a gift that God has shared among all of his people, even those who have failed him. Dante’s *Divine Comedy: The Inferno, The Purgatorio and The Paraiso* depicts this central concept of ubiquitous love. At the start of Dante’s journey, he encounters the city of Dis, where betrayers show no remorse for their actions. The tenants of lower Hell have either betrayed God, used their love for God inappropriately or have deemed themselves to be immortal. Dante encounters almost no love in this part of Hell. However, he sees an increasing amount of love as he continues up the tiers. His venture through Purgatory leads to him to the steps of the “perfect acts of confession” where he confesses his sins to the guardian angel (Ciardi, Pg. 357). The idea of confession laid out in this section of the book reveals that the act of forgiveness that exemplifies God’s love for his people. On the final leg of his expedition, Dante journeys through the Earthly Paradise and Paraiso, the final realm before one’s ascension into heaven. He learns that God’s divine and eternal love applies to everyone and therefore allows all humans to love each other. The acts of divine love, displayed through God’s forgiveness and humans’ love for others, relate to Pope Francis’ idea of “loving your enemies” (Laudato Si, Par. 228). Sinners of betrayal are God’s enemies, but He overlooks their nefarious actions and still shows his love unconditionally.

In addition to “loving your enemies,” Pope Francis emphasizes the significance of community and the interconnectedness of humanity. Specifically, he states “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] Therefore, 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] With 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, Par. 231). He says that social love is a key component of community, and in order to develop it we must unite and love one another. Developing a sense of community plays a big role in the meaning of civic and political love for the common good. The “universal fraternity” that has been created by God was established to maintain the gift given to us by Him because “care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity of living together and in communion” (Laudato Si, Par. 228). The film *The Mission* illustrates this idea of love in the community. The movie depicts the rugged relationship developed between the Guarani and Jesuits. Rodrigo, a mercenary, is forced to serve a treacherous penance for the heinous crime he committed. After enduring the punishment, the Guarani set Rodrigo free of his burden and began to come in communion with one another. Roderigo is ordained into the Jesuit order and build a missionary for the Guarani. The sense of community and love shared among the groups allowed them to work harmoniously. However, instead of continuing the peaceful path to

embracing the Jesuit values, the Guarani face the potential of being enslaved due to the Portuguese's ignorance.

Pope Francis comments on our responsibility as an interconnected family to care for one another and the Earth. To do so, he says "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, Par.229). Pope Francis emphasizes that society has become too focused on frivolous, unimportant things and trying to impress others. In doing so, we have become ignorant to the greater good of our world, such as global warming, deforestation and the water crisis. The Pope urges his readers to realize that there needs to be a great change. Our sole concentration has become greed with total disregard of our values and morals. Looking at different aspects of the worlds, such as marketing tactics, all of societies values are being exploited. In addition to the lack of respect for morals, there are also issues among our community as a whole. Social inequality causes people to become unfaithful and dishonest to each other, leading to the disruption of our interconnected unit. The last scene of *The Mission* exemplifies the terror and violent actions that Pope Francis describes as the result of the deterioration of social love and caring for others. Towards the conclusion of the film, the Guarani and Rodrigo stand together against the Portuguese forces. They stand their ground as a community but are tragically slaughtered by the Portuguese. However, their faith, devotion to

God and social love for one another allowed them to endure the forces of the Portuguese until their very last moments of life.

Love is natural gesture that should influence our daily lives and gratitude towards others. Pope Francis includes a quote about the simplicity of love from Saint Therese of Lisieux where she “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, Par. 230). As a child, my parents enforced the ideas of being kind to others and offering small gestures. A compliment or simple smile can change a person’s day, just as Saint Therese of Lisieux emphasizes. According to the idea of “integral ecology,” one act of kindness can have a huge impact on the receiver (Laudato Si, Par. 230). This discussion of making a difference reminds me of a tale from my childhood called the Starfish Story. The boy in the story tosses starfish back into the ocean one at a time in order to preserve their lives. An older man mocks the boy for taking on such a daunting task. In response to the comment, the boy picks up another starfish to throw back into the ocean and replies “I made a difference for that one” (The Starfish Story). This tale demonstrates the impact of a small action on the world we call our common home, which reiterates Saint Theresa’s central point. Pope Francis includes the quote from Saint Theresa to highlight that love has the power to adjoin the world to work harmoniously as one family.

The Pope concludes his encyclical letter by addressing the significance of society uniting to protect the common good by saying “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” (Laudato Si, Par. 232). During the current pandemic, the personnel on the frontlines risks their lives to protect the common good of the people. It is not one person’s responsibility to hold the weight of the world, there is a need for help. This pandemic has allowed healthcare workers from far and wide to come together and work as one unit to care for the ill affected by COVID-19. While choosing to become a nursing major, I knew I was deciding to put my life on the line to save others. What is it that drives people to want to risk their lives for the good of others? Ultimately, it comes down to love and passion for the common good of society. As a nurse, our job is to care for others that are in need. Whether it is exposing ourselves to deadly disease or simply helping someone get out of bed, the care for our patients arises from the love we share for one another.

While healthcare workers are on the frontlines taking care of people affected by COVID-19, the earth is also having a chance to heal. Pope Francis notes that human activity, such as driving cars and factory production, has led to neglect of the Earth. Living with a “throwaway culture” causes major harm to the environment which will fail to mend itself unless humans take action (Laudato Si, Par. 22). He expresses that “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, Par. 232). Small actions, such as picking up a piece of trash or lessening the production of waste are ways to manifest civic and political love towards the planet. Pope Francis believes that our responsibility is to take care of the earth because God gifted it to us to protect it. For example, a community near my hometown gathered together to clean up a polluted portion of the Delaware River to make a difference in their town. This endeavor displays the “self-giving love” that the Pope emphasizes (Laudato Si, Par. 232). Imagine the difference the world could see if every town took part in this example of love. Learning to conserve resources and care for the environment as a community can be a way to become closer to God. Our care shows God the love and affection we have towards him because we are able to love and appreciate what we have been granted dominion over.

In his encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis shows that he has hope that love and unity can help to achieve his dreams for the future. Love is a pure expression that has the potential to change the world. As we have seen throughout the texts this semester, civic and political love can be depicted in multiple ways. In Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, he shows that forgiveness and human connection are expressions of divine love. Similarly, in *The Mission*, human connection and love allowed the Guarani to persevere through the inevitable outcome. In addition to the differing expressions of love, we see that small acts of kindness, care for the environment and for one another make a difference. Lessening the amount of waste produced and abolishing “throwaway culture” are steps in the direction towards more love for the environment and God (Laudato Si, par. 22). Love is forgiveness. Love is a simple gesture. Love is compassion for others. Love is the key to better world for mankind.

Works Cited

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