

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

Jewel Stokes

There is one thing that every single human being has in common. It is not some aspect of our genetic makeup, nor is it a physical quality. All humans are here. All humans live here, on planet earth and she is our common home. Earth is our home and has been depicted as an essential part of the solar system in some famous works of literature. For example, in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, Dante believes in a Ptolemaic system which means that earth is the center of the universe (Florence Inferno 2013). In the *Divine Comedy*, Dante even added a Christian spin to this theory and had the nine heavens revolve around earth. This could be a metaphor that the heavens surround earth to protect her and her inhabitants. Today, even with the protection of the heavens there is a lack of genuine love to allow earth to flourish. Now, more than ever it is important that we work together to renovate our common home. She has been contaminated with greed and global warming. In *Laudato Si: On Care for Our Common Home*, Pope Francis speaks on long term solutions for saving our common home, which are civic and political love. Civic love will cultivate respect for our environment, which would ultimately lead to a decrease in global warming. Political love will eliminate greed and push us toward a society that aims for common good, rather than individual gain. To integrate civic and political love into our lives now would take some readjusting, because many societies are built on centuries of mistreating fellow humans and the environment. Small actions form habits and Pope Francis suggests that "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" (Pope Francis 166). So when we remove ourselves from toxic societal and cultural norms, we can begin to rebuild our common home and give her the renovations she desperately needs. In simple terms, civic and political

love is care and respect for each other and the environment.

The dictionary defines civic as anything that relates to a city or town, including any duties or activities of people in said duty or town (“civic”). Pope Francis refers to civic love and begins by stating his own definition in relation to the environment “Care for nature is part of a lifestyle which includes the capacity for living together and communion” (Pope Francis 165). An important component to living a life that is integrated in civic love is being able to love other humans and nature. Loving humans and the environment may seem like a rather simple task but it is a duty that humans have struggled with for years. For example, the movie *The Mission*, depicts the eternal struggle some have of superiority. Father Gabriel and Rodrigo attempted to explain to other Europeans that the native Guaraní people were their brethren, even if they looked and lived differently. In a Christian sense, Father Gabriel and Rodrigo abided by the concept that Pope Francis mentions 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 a means of repaying others for what they have done or will do for us” (Pope Francis 165). In this situation, the European elite saw the native people and conjured up ways to profit from them and what they can obtain from them. Whereas Christian love is not about a personal gain. Although many Spaniards in this movie claimed to believe in and love God, this could not be true if they did not love their brothers who were the Guaraní people. Brother is not meant in a literal, biological sense but in a fraternal sense. Since the Christian faith believes we all come from God, this would make all humans brothers and sisters. 1 John 4:20-21 states that “If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him:

whoever loves God must also love his brother.” This scripture depicts why Christianity is ultimately the blueprint for a civilization of love which Pope Francis will refer to later in the text.

The Mission was a story that depicted two versions of Christianity, but only one of them related to civic love. One version was that of the upper-class Europeans who saw the native people as inferior to them. They used scripture to justify enslaving other human beings. Then, the other version of Christianity is the one Pope Francis envisions when he mentions civic love. It is the version of Christianity that Father Gabriel and Rodrigo practice; The type of Christianity that recognized that all humans are one because they come from the same flesh and have the same father. The type of Christianity that Pope Francis uses to explain how “That is why it is possible to love our enemies” (Pope Francis 165). This is the type of Christianity that we as humans should strive for everyday when interacting with others in our community.

To further elaborate on why the practices of Father Gabriel and Rodrigo were so admirable in Christian eyes, the two men heard their calling and chose to go against their cultural norms to show the Guaraní people love. This was displayed during the scene where the Guaraní people went to visit the European elite to prove that they were human. A little native boy sang for his audience in attempt to prove himself worthy of living a human life. The elite Europeans could not understand why Father Gabriel and Rodrigo were fighting to save the lives of those seen as inferior in society. But, Father Gabriel knew that it was his calling to fight for the native people who had no voice in his society. Pope Francis explains that even in present time, it is imperative that we follow the callings of God if we ever want to make a difference; “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” (Pope Francis 165). To build a new society built on social love, we would have to break preexisting social dynamics.

Civic love extends beyond other humans, but it also refers to the environment and nature. Currently, global warming is a major concern for the human race and is due to generations of abusing earth. If we look to God and recognize that all of the natural tools and resources have been put on the planet by him for us to coexist and not abuse, the earth can begin to heal. If we extend our love for each other to the environment, we may find that “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”” (Pope Francis 165). To embody universal fraternity, first we must see people and things as they are and not as we want them to be.

Sometimes, we forget that other people are only human too and it is easy to get enthralled in our own lives and problems. This can lead to a narcissistic attitude where we only see other people as pawns and what they can do for us. In class this semester, one question proposed stuck with me. “How do we use other people?” The answer to this question can be inherently good or bad depending on the person answering. If you ask the Europeans from *The Mission*, they would say we use people beneath us to do labor. If you ask people in circle two canto five in Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, they would say we use people for physical pleasure. If you ask the writer and theologian C.S. Lewis, he would say we use people to love. Pope Francis reminds us 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 immorality and the mockery of ethics, goodness, faith and honesty. It is time to acknowledge that light-hearted superficiality has done us no good” (Pope Francis 166).

Currently, two people living in the same city, of the same socioeconomic background can experience vastly different realities. When we look at society now, especially American society, it is evident that years of slavery and segregation still factor into our civic space. Meaning that generations of some believing that others are less than or inferior is now costing people their lives. Black people specifically bear the hardships of a society that does not love nor respect them due to America’s long past with racism. Black men are being targeted and attacked consistently because they are seen as violent or non-cooperative. But why is this their label? So, when our social lives are based on an imaginary racial hierarchy, this leads to tension and violence. Pope Francis recognizes the imbalance of social lives all over the world and says “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” (Pope Francis 166). Once the notion that one group of people is superior to the other, the foundation of society broke and we are still figuring out how to properly balance this imbalance of human worth.

To have a society that lives in civic love, we would have to unlearn years of hatred from the past and just see each other as someone to love on. As our brothers and sisters. But how would we even begin to unravel the wicked society that has been created? Simple, we break the cycle of violence. Pope Francis notes 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 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” (Pope Francis 166). Not all love is created equally; there is agape, storge, philia and eros (C.S. Lewis 1960). Agape is Christian love, storge is familial love, philia is love between friends and eros is love between the sexes. The four types of love create different relationships, but they are all each necessary for a functioning society and they are built off of respect for another person. Our common home is here, it is earth. All humans have at least one thing in common and that is that we live on planet earth and call her home. Through cultivating the four types of love, we can integrate love into our daily lives until it becomes natural to see people as equal. Until it becomes natural to take care of our home, earth. Until it become natural to have civic love here in our common home. In a world where injustice and hate is so seemingly natural, we must rewire our minds and habits to return to a new normal. This rewiring of our minds and habits is referred to as renewing value; “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] (Pope Francis 167). Now, it is time to renew the value for the underprivileged, the poor and the underrepresented demographics in this world by learning to give them love simply because they are our brethren. It costs nothing to love, it costs nothing to show love but we have everything to gain from loving more.

The idea of common good is a simple concept, that is presented in the bible repeatedly. Ephesians 4:32 says “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgive one another, as God in

Christ forgave you.” As Christians, the idea is to become more Christ like, and in becoming like Christ we must remember to forgive one another which is why “...the Church set before the world the ideal of a “civilization of love” (Pope Francis 167).

The good Samaritan is the epitome of civic love seen in the bible. In Luke 10:25-37, a man was robbed and left on the street. A Levite and priest past by him, it was a Samaritan that came to the man’s aid. The Samaritan took the man to an inn, bandaged him and took care of him. This story reminds us to be a good neighbor even when others are not. Pope Francis says “Love for society and commitment to the common good are outstanding expressions of a charity... In this framework, along with the importance of little everyday gestures, social love moves us to devise larger strategies...to encourage a “culture of care” which permeates all of society” (Pope Francis 167). Once a culture of care is deeply implemented into society, we will see a shift in the human perspective of each other and the environment; then civic love will begin to flourish.

Politics can be a daunting subject for most and many people vouch to not even mention it at the dinner table. It is possible to care about politics and the state of our world without running for president and without wearing your political party on a hat. There are many ways to make a difference, Pope Francis acknowledges that “Not everyone is called to engage directly in political life. 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” (Pope Francis 167). I believe that political love is not imposing political beliefs on others, nor is it mobs of people yelling opposing ideas. It is,

however, actions that bring people together to fight for the common good of each other and the planet. Political love would be a government that fights for the poor and feeds the hungry.

Political love is a society where we are not self-indulgent but look out for one another, “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” (Pope Francis 168). Political love and civic love is the glue that holds all of us humans together in our common home.

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