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Core Capstone Final Essay

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Professor Greeley

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Throughout the semester, the course, *Truth, Justice, and the Common Good*, brought awareness to themes of the environment, common good, and social issues. Environmental justice is the involvement of the society to respect and care for environmental laws and regulations. It is a part of the common good to appreciate and respect the natural world. The common good is customized toward every individual and it is the decision of the human being to recognize the common good daily. From the readings and presentations in class, a correlation was formed between beliefs and values towards topics in religion, justice, and community. The four common core questions of ‘What does it mean to be human?’, ‘What does it mean to live a life of meaning and purpose?’, ‘What does it mean to understand and appreciate the natural world?’, and ‘What does it mean to forge a more just society for the common good?’, were exemplified in different forms, both for and against, throughout the various texts.

In *Matthew: 5 – 7*, Jesus presents a sermon to his disciples on the top of the mountain. The sermon teaches his people how to be human and live a life of purpose, in relation to pleasing God with one’s wisdom, love, and grace. Jesus’ blessings became known as the *Beatitudes* and continue to be recited in present day. “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3) gives a sense of hope for those who do not believe in God. It is acknowledged that God is needed in daily life. For those who do trust in God, they are able to have a connection with him and ask for his help through prayer. God is placed before all material things. “Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted” (Matthew 5:4) teaches that Jesus is always available for comfort and guidance, and those who mourn because of sin and sorrow will be forgiven. Through family and friends, God’s love can be experienced and touched. The principles conveyed in the *Beatitudes* are steps to forging a more just society for the common good. A community is formed

when the same principles are followed and believed. It is important to recognize those principles in order to have an understanding of the common good in one's own community.

The first epistle of the *Corinthians*, written by the apostle Paul, teaches about the spiritual gifts in the early church and the appreciation for the body of Christ. Paul's purpose for writing about the spiritual gifts is for new Christians of the community to understand why the gifts are present. The Holy Spirit gives gifts in order for his people live a better life and to share them with others. The gifts include, words of wisdom and knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, speaking in tongues, and prophecy. "There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them." (1 Corinthians: 12) Each gift has a different meaning for every individual. However, they are all given by one Spirit and are to be used for the common good. Similar to the body being made up of many different parts, the different gifts given to each human being make up the body of Christ. "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ." (1 Corinthians: 12) Together, the gifts and the people join Christ as a community. Although everyone is created in the image of God, each individual maintains his or her own human dignity. Their self-respect, empowerment, and worth are interpreted through their own sense, not through anything else.

Living with the common good forms a society of people who have the same interests, goals, and lifestyle. Although it may appear that one is living a life to only benefit the common good, there are specific problems in the society that may hold one back from fully living. In order to live in a community, one must engage with others through conversation. In the current generation, technology has taken over all means of in-person conversation. The use of text messages, emails, social media posts, and video chatting has taken over the purpose of living in a community and the use of machinery and robots has taken the place of hard work paying off. Technology is a major

part of the current society and is important to know how to use in order to be fully educated and even, employed. Both Thomas Merton's *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* and Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate* discuss the use of technology in the society through different viewpoints.

Merton analyzes a human's use of technology from a spiritual standpoint. Although technology does not take individuals away from a spiritual lifestyle, it does take away their full awareness of living a meaningful life. "We must be detached from the spiritual life, but we must still live it. And the purpose of the detachment is only to enable us to live it on a higher level". (Merton, 25) The use of technology brings the society into a virtual lifestyle. All of the ways to communicate with others, research information, and learn new skills has been replaced by a single device. The device of technology detaches humans from living with the spirit. Although being detached may enable human beings to live past fear, it should not make them forget about pleasing God. When an individual is trapped in a lifestyle of technology, their full awareness is not present for the spirit. The common good is to live as God's teachings suggest one to. With the use of technology, the society is unable to fully experience the gifts that God presents. The changes in the world with technical devices changes an individual's values and the connection one has with the world.

In chapter six of Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*, the link between society and technology brings upon a challenge. The challenge is not spoken as negatively as Merton's theory about technology. "Technology is highly attractive because it draws us out of our physical limitations and broadens our horizon. But human freedom is authentic only when it responds to the fascination of technology with decisions that are the fruit of moral responsibility." (Benedict XVI, 70) The chapter discusses an individual's limit of freedom when using technology. A human needs to first recognize his or her own freedom, before entering the world of technology. The

freedom given in technology is a different kind of freedom; one that allows for labor to be done in a more simple and effective way. Technology should by no means take away an individual's development of freedom and personal choice. With technology, Benedict XVI explained, a moral responsibility is required. It is a "human reality" (Benedict XVI, 69) that one cannot escape from. "Technology enables us to exercise dominion over matter, to reduce risks, to save labor, to improve our conditions of life." (Benedict XVI, 69) Although technology is overwhelming, it gives individuals a type of power that allows for an easier route out. However, technology should not take away from one's own personal morals and freedom. It is difficult for someone to have a full understanding of the society, when most of his or her life is lived with technology. To fully be human, one must understand and appreciate the natural world. In order to do so, technology should be limited.

Another theme discussed in the course is environmental justice. Environmental justice is when a movement of people of different race, color, occupation, and income, strive to take care of the environment with fair respect. The environment is where a human's ground lies. Environmental laws, policies, and regulations are constantly ignored. People do not take care of the world around them, which puts individuals in danger with their health and lifestyle. It takes a great effort to maintain a clean environment and it is a reflection of the community's care on how well it is kept. In the *Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis*, the issues of environmental justice are discussed.

"It is my hope that this *Encyclical Letter*, which is now added to the body of the Church's social teaching, can help us to acknowledge the appeal, immensity and urgency of the challenge we face", Pope Francis said. (Francis, 13) The environment is one's own life and home. Every individual's body is a part of the natural world and it is the duty of the society to not be selfish in causing damage. "To commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin

against God.” (Francis, 3) The natural world is a human’s home and for one to destroy the world they live in is a sin against God’s creation. Religious communities respond to the natural world by recognizing the lack of awareness and appreciation. The human footprint goes beyond oneself.

The poor and animals suffer the most from environmental degradation. They have no voice and cannot control what is happening around them such as, the production of plastic and chemical spreads. The simple act of littering, which some may not even realize is done, destroys the ground for growth and for the health of animals. When animals eat harmful litter, it causes harm to their bodies. Many individuals have a voice but are selfish therefore, they are not concerned about the environment or the issues that evolve from it. In the end, health problems and damage arise. The damage to the community brings forth issues of social injustice. It is unfair for some parts of the society to respect the environment, while others cause damage to it. Since everyone lives in one environmental space, a common good should be formed for all to help the environment.

In the *Gospel of Life*, John Paul II addresses the issues of social injustice with death and destruction as a solution to most problems. With the major events that have occurred throughout history, many life changes have followed such as, a drop in the economy and a loss of hope for the world. After the Cold War, several people believed that the world had finally settled and that a perfect life would begin. However, they were wrong. From all of the chaos and harm to the world from wars, a new culture was created. John Paul saw the culture as a “culture of death”. (John Paul II, 1) Violence was leniently being used as an easy option for death. The story of Cain and Abel proves that death was considered to be an easy way out. “Envy and anger have the upper hand over the Lord's warning, and so Cain attacks his own brother and kills him.” (John Paul II, 8) Cain violated his values, the spirit, and his own dignity by killing his brother because of his own

jealously and hatred. Actions such as those of Cain were frequently happening during the time. John Paul wrote the encyclical to bring awareness about the violent issue.

“On a more general level, there exists in contemporary culture a certain Promethean attitude which leads people to think that they can control life and death by taking the decisions about them into their own hands. What really happens in this case is that the individual is overcome and crushed by a death deprived of any prospect of meaning or hope.” (John Paul II, 15) Violence is not something that should ever occur, nor for the purpose of intent murder. Although one’s own death cannot be controlled, a murderer can control his or her actions. Suffering needs to be eliminated from the start and death will occur when it is time for the individual, not for the murderer. When suffering cannot be avoided, life has no meaning. The clash between what is good and what is evil, as well as with life and death, brings forth a conflict that the society is often faced with.

John Paul explained that a culture of life with the common good is what a perfect world should be. The common good is the interest of the society between what is right and what is wrong. It is shared throughout the community and benefits the society as a whole. Throughout life, one’s human dignity can be attacked. Destruction of human life is sometimes supported such as, with the death penalty, artificial reproduction, and abortion. The destructions make the value of life to be low. John Paul outlines in the *Gospel of Life* how the culture of life should not have any false attributes, as it is an insult to the human life that God has created. When an act of violence or destruction brings forth a conflict in the society, the action is spread and believed to be an acceptable act in the society. A culture of death and violence should not exist; a culture of life needs to be created in order to be fully human and live a life of meaning and purpose.

The common good is achieved by not only being in community with others of similar interests and intentions, but also by following guidelines available by God. *Matthew: 5 -7* and the first epistle of the *Corinthians* present blessings and teach about the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The *Beatitudes* that Jesus presented on the mountain explain the values of recognizing and living a life with meaning and purpose. Living a life of meaning and purpose is to better the individual and those in the community that he or she lives in. The blessings and gifts from God are provided in order to help one to recognize the correct path of life. It is important to follow the structure of life that God has set up for his people. By doing so, less negativity evolves. As some may not realize it, the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and faith are used in everyday life. Every individual may follow the blessings of the *Beatitudes* or use their gifts in different ways however, God's intention for both of them was to help humans live a life as one of his disciples would live.

The contemporary society is not based off of traditional values. Technology has taken over human connection, which takes away relationships within the society. The lack of relationships causes individuals to not care about others or the world around them. Environmental issues arise because of the society's attitude and selfishness. People are first concerned with themselves, and leave the environment for others to take care of. When no one else cares to maintain the ground that is stepped on, more problems of social injustice arise. Material things have taken over the generation's care for what is truly important in the world. Although it is difficult to reach a common good throughout the world, it is beneficial when communities form to spread awareness about certain issues. The social and public values of the current generation determine how the world is now and what it will become in the future.

Some people may love it or hate it however, the use of technology is only growing and adapting more to the society. It is an easier way to communicate and learn about the world.

Machinery and equipment are handled easier and create a more effective workplace. As there are many positive aspects about technology, negative points are also considered. In *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, Merton's view on the use of technology as being negative is because it takes away holiness from a person's life. When someone can look to God for help, they look to their technology instead. A life is not to be lived through a technical device. More is appreciated when less is handed to someone. To live a moral life, one needs to appreciate the people and world around them, without any extra additions of material objects. Technology should only be a bonus in one's life and not a necessity. "The mere fact that these new routines weary and exhaust nature, deaden our perceptions, and diminish our spiritual vitality is wrongly treated as per se "supernatural". (Merton, 25) Technology is not natural and should not be combined with daily living. It discourages the ideas of a community and takes away the meaning of one's life with challenges to the spirit.

The *Encyclical Letter of Pope Francis* allows for individuals to recognize the damage done daily to the environment. Many people do not think of the environment as being unjust and believe that the animals, nature, and surrounding areas care for themselves. In order for the environment to maintain a safe place for people to live and breathe in, the society needs to make a group effort in caring for it. It is a part of the common good to treat the environment with respect and attention. When there is a lack of maintenance, it ruins the home of humans and animals. Pope Francis' main concern in his encyclical is the selfishness of humans. It is important to care for one's own health and lifestyle in order to live a long life. To do so, the condition of the environment must be acknowledged. The condition of the poor and animals must also be cared for because they do not have the same voice or privileges as others in the society. They can only accept what is given to them and what they have to live with in the natural world.

A culture of death and violence is a major concern that John Paul II addresses in his encyclical, the *Gospel of Life*. He tells the story of Cain and Abel to represent the culture of death and violence. Cain killed Abel because of his jealousy toward his brother's better gift to God. God asked Cain about what happened to Abel and punished him for his wrongdoing. Instead of killing Cain, God's punishment was to show him that his actions toward his brother were wrong and that he would have to live with what he did for the rest of his life. Death and destruction are an easy way out of one's own feelings, as some may believe in killing to relieve personal problems. The actions done to end a life do not reflect on what it means to be human. Instead, a culture of life should be lived to fully understand the purpose of a meaningful life.

Threats to human life are threats to God, as he created every human being. The commandment, 'You shall not kill', should be followed in the new culture of life. It is wrong to live a life of death and violence, when a culture of life is proven to be more beneficial. One is allowed to engage in the community, speak the truth, and live freely. When violence is involved, the whole perception of freedom is changed. It is morally wrong to use violence as an act of revenge or relief. Violence has been present in every generation of history, but it is never the right answer. Being used as revenge, such as with the death penalty, is hypocritical. In order to punish someone, as God punished Cain, murder does not need to occur. Instead, the individual who committed the wrong act needs to live with their sorrow and sin for as long as necessary. From that punishment, one may learn a new lesson. The value and dignity of a human's life is sacred and should be seen as a gift and responsibility, rather than an advantage.

As a double major in Communications and Media Arts, it is a part of my daily studies as a journalist to learn about the different issues happening in the world. For the past semester, I had the opportunity to intern with Fox News Channel in New York City. In order to report on the

worldwide news, issues needed to be closely examined and analyzed. The themes of human dignity, social justice, and the common good were not only read about in the common core class, but also through my daily life and internship. The themes of the course are present everywhere; in the news, on the streets, and in one's own life. Human rights are what create a common good within a society. Although there is not a mutual agreement for every topic in life, the common good provides for what is right and what is wrong, customized toward each individual. The *Ten Commandments* should still be followed, as they create the pathway toward living with the common good in a community. The *Beatitudes* should still be recognized, as each blessing that one could provide creates for a better society. Although there are critiques within the contemporary society, each issue can be examined deeper to find out the cause and effect of it.

The core question, 'What does it mean to be human?' is one that I strive to answer daily. Everyday is sacred and should be lived to the fullest. By being involved with Sacred Heart University clubs and organizations, I prioritize my time to spend with the school. By going to school and interning, I prioritize my time for my education and career endeavors. Traveling allows for me to learn outside of the classroom and experience different cultures around the world. Being human however, is not just about bettering one self. My extensive amount of charity work allows for me to share the gifts that God has given me and help others to be human. Living fully human each and everyday also answers the core question, 'What does it mean to live a life of meaning and purpose?' To live life to the fullest everyday is ambitious, but in the end, one is not only helping themselves, but also helping others to follow in the same footprints.

I care for the environment not only to clean the homes of the society, but also to maintain my health and that of others. What is put into my body is what affects my health. I try to eat all natural and organic food in order to make sure that I am not harming the body that God has created

for me. The environment needs to be maintained by the society as a whole to ensure no risks. The core question, ‘What does it mean to appreciate and understand the natural world?’ is answered by an effort to keep the ground safe, clean, and maintained. One must understand the natural world by recognizing the issues that have been brought up because of a lack of care and selfishness. The environment is the home to humans, animals, and nature. It should be appreciated and cared for daily by the society. By doing so, the common core question, ‘What does it mean to forge a more just society for the common good?’ is answered. Environmental justice aims to fight for the rights of the environment and to create a common good for all people in the community to live by.

In the course, *Truth, Justice, and the Common Good*, many readings, presentations, and research allowed for students to recognize challenging issues and what is meant by a sense of community and the common good. The common core questions brought forth additional information to be analyzed throughout the texts in order to gain a better understanding of the writer’s argument and purpose. Issues of technology, justice, and violence continue to be challenged today. Individuals forget about their morals and personal values therefore, they commit wrong actions and show no care. It is important to live through the common core questions and by the teachings and gifts of Jesus. By doing so, a more just society will be lived by oneself and by the community.

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