

APPLIED BIOETHICS

M A G A Z I N E

The Human Person

Issue No. 01

"God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them." Man occupies a unique place in creation: (I) he is "in the image of God"; (II) in his own nature he unites the spiritual and material worlds; (III) he is created "male and female"; (IV) God established him in his friendship.

- Catechism of the Catholic Church #355

01.

INTRODUCTION

I grew up in a military family. My dad, an active-duty fighter pilot, followed an aggressive career trajectory. When he was in a pilot job, the operations tempo was extreme. Ninety-day deployments often came with little rest back at home.

His potential became apparent as a standout student at the Air Force Academy. That quality led to many career-broadening postings. At most frequent, we'd move yearly, and we never stayed in one place for more than two years. As a child, it made no difference to me. It was life as I knew it. I continue to see my upbringing in a military family as a net positive on my life. I lived in six states, within the city limits of the District of Columbia, and in Seoul, South Korea. My life was in motion with few stable things outside of family, faith, school, and scouting.

Family traditions are important markers in life. They serve as waypoints that we pass through, changing and growing as we walk down the path of life. A standard family tradition is to return year after year to a regular vacation spot. For my family, we traveled around the world. Our vacations took us to different places every year. We rented lake houses and pontoon boats on lakes near the bases where we lived. We met with my grandparents on a quiet beach in Hawaii and traveled to the Badlands to see Mount Rushmore. We stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon and observed its natural beauty. We drove down to the Florida Keys and stayed in a Coast Guard bungalow on one vacation. We spent Christmas Day in Singapore, relaxed on the beaches of Okinawa, and climbed the Great Wall of China. Every holiday brought a new corner of the globe to explore.

Cape May is on an island at the southern tip of New Jersey. On one coast is the Atlantic Ocean, and on the other is the Chesapeake Bay. It's a historic town where presidents and Members of Congress spent days in the early 1800s. It's funny that planning for the future and prosperity of our Nation happened in this beach town. After my dad retired from the Air Force, we moved to the East Coast. My dad discovered Cape May when searching for a quiet place to celebrate an anniversary. Now, more than a decade since our family's first trip to the island, it's become my family's default vacation spot.

My parents visit Cape May annually. Every Thanksgiving, my siblings and I bring our families to town. We spend the entire week on family, fun, and

gratitude. Those November days are cold and windy, with only the locals left in town. The beaches are quiet, and the pace of life is slow. It's a high mark of my year, a cherished event on my calendar.

Many of those November mornings, I like to be out on the beach at sunrise. I watch the vivid reds, oranges, yellows, and pinks paint the sky as the sun appears on the horizon in solitude. It's a cathartic experience. Wrapped in my winter clothes, I am alone in creation. The only sound is the roaring ocean crashing against the sandy beach. The experience is a natural invitation to explore life's big questions. A picture of one of those sunrises serves as the cover art for this Magazine.

I studied Philosophy in college. There are many practical degrees, but Philosophy isn't one of them. A liberal arts education didn't equip me with particular skills for the workforce. I gained no technical knowledge, no business acumen, and no defined career path. Instead, through study, I learned to think for myself. My mind, now open, gained the ability to analyze the world. Ancient Greek philosophy was the most substantial influence on the curriculum in my program. I asked questions, engaged, and gained an understanding of the implications of the best of human thought.

I love Ancient Greek philosophy, but Logic has a special place in my heart. Logic influenced my intellectual and personal development the most. The study of Logic and its systems unlocked something in my brain. It allowed me to process almost everything in my life through a logical framework. It's like bringing order to chaos as I move throughout my day. When I read a news story, the lines of argument rise above the fluff. When I hear arguments in a debate, I can understand the nuance of language. As I listen to a music album, the themes unpack. Whatever the subject, the logical process leads me to deeper understanding.

A well-rounded education in Philosophy goes beyond the great secular philosophers. Catholic thinkers throughout the ages have developed themes and applied principles to new disciplines. Few schools of thought have proven as durable and lasting as the Catholic Intellectual Tradition. Comprised of all contributions of Catholic thinkers throughout time, they influence theology, philosophy, politics, and science.

It might seem strange to start a new publication based on a school of thought created by organized religion. Organized religion is no longer the cornerstone of our communal life. Young people are leaving churches in droves. Baby boomers continue to express their tepid faith. As the silent generation

passes on, the outlook for religion is bleak. By turning away from religion, we miss out on the fulfillment that it offers.

Spirituality is as much a part of the person as the physical body and the human intellect. Religion is about more than theology and liturgies. It's about helping us to live more balanced and fulfilling lives. There's a built-in community. Like-minded individuals from diverse backgrounds and careers coalesce around a singular mission. This unity grants a sense of belonging.

Religion takes the world's chaos and organizes it around a moral code. The events of our lives, good and bad, are a logical progression throughout life. We make better decisions when we have clear concepts of right and wrong. There's a plumb line against which we can judge our conduct, decisions, and outcomes.

Practicing religion also grants us a greater sense of self-awareness. You can't live a healthy life by only thinking healthy thoughts. You have to eat well, sleep, and exercise. That's because we are multi-dimensional. Neglecting our physical, emotional, relational, intellectual, or spiritual health is a prescription for misery.

Religion provides structure to our lives. Some free spirits may protest, but structure is inherent in the human condition. We thrive on it, and we need it. If you doubt that statement, I direct your attention to the pandemic shut-downs of 2020. Without connection, many felt the glue holding our society together coming undone. Without our natural routine and structures, we felt lost. Workers at home worked more than they ever had before. We yearned to get out of the house and go on our vacations. Mental health took a huge hit. The result was less charity shown towards our neighbors and fellow man.

Any goal that we pursue in life requires structure. The odds of our success improve the more accountability is in the process. The routine of the religious calendar and liturgies provides that structure.

Participation rates in weekly religious services are declining. Many churches are closing, but this isn't the measure of success. Religion is missionary and redemptive. It always seeks the lost. Religion reaches out to those who once knew the truth but let life get in the way. It's always there, waiting to help, support, and encourage people on the path of life.

We recently ended a long run of intellectual growth. Our current intellectual impoverishment reminds me of the Middle Ages. Back then, the elite viewed the education of the masses as a threat to their status and power. So,

they jealously kept knowledge to themselves. As a result, humanity endured decades of lethargic intellectual progress.

Legions of Catholic monks worked with tireless determination to save Western Civilization. They preserved the works that underpin Western thought. Thanks to them, we benefit from the wisdom of the Ancients. It's going to take more than a generation of "spiritual, not religious" people to take religion down.

Active participation in Catholicism is lower than in previous decades. Despite this, its moral teachings and reputation remain consistent and clear. Even the most anti-religious in society must recognize that the Church is consistent. She has an unimpeachable record of respect for human life. The Church's doctrine has consistently promoted the dignity of the human person to the greatest possible degree.

This Magazine isn't an academic work. The intent is to help you understand context and complexity. Bioethics has an impact on your life and the lives of those that you love. The best help is the help that's available and accessible. These articles have a conversational tone, which makes intricate and complex topics understandable. While not academic, the material is challenging. Reading each issue will take considered thought and reflection.

2020 was a crash course for us on the intersection of medicine, public health, and public policy. Amid the chaos, the importance of bioethics was evident. As a global community, we faced the threat of a new and poorly understood virus. In that fog of war, science became a tool to coerce democratic societies to abandon core principles of liberty. Authorities demanded that we submit to arbitrary dictates. The initial goal of preventing an overwhelming of hospital resources was noble and likely correct. But, as time went on and COVID-19 was better understood, the self-serving intentions of policymakers became clear.

We learned in 2020 that we must take responsibility for ourselves. We can no longer blindly trust experts to act in our best interest. If we want to pursue morally correct bioethical decisions, we must take charge. We must be active in the medical decision-making process for ourselves and our loved ones.

Biomedical technology is improving daily. New pharmaceutical drugs and therapies make it to market at a rapid pace. Along with them are options for treating dysfunctions that were previously untreatable. This growth is the natural consequence of scientific inquiry, and it's a positive sign. Using our knowledge to improve people's lives is the perfect use of the human intellect.

The problem with science is that it's amoral. It has no moral code. It can do evil, or it can do good. This moral hazard is why we need bioethics. We need to process scientific research and advancement through an ethical framework. We must ensure that scientific work focuses on serving the universal human good.

We're living longer and thus encountering new questions in healthcare. Birth control and abortion are available everywhere. More invasive surgeries are possible later in life, and indefinite preservation of life is theoretically possible. New vaccine technologies are passing clinical trials, and some jurisdictions permit licensed medical providers to prescribe fatal doses of medications to those who ask for them.

The question is no longer, "Can we do it?" The question must be, "It is ethical to do it?" Will this decision promote the health and wellbeing of the human person? Does it intend to support the natural lifecycle? Is it done in a manner that doesn't come at the expense of another human life?

The good news is that these technologies and treatment advances give patients options. Time is our most precious commodity, and we can keep more of it. But, along with choice comes the responsibility to engage in the ethical decision-making process.

Bioethics is no longer the prerogative of physicians. Patients and providers must both seek out answers to these complex and consequential questions. These answers deal with more than just life and death. They deal with the protection of the fundamental dignity of every human person. We must make moral decisions, even when the medical community suggests otherwise.

As a Catholic publication, this Magazine will work in the service of the human person. We'll put together a basic understanding of the human person in this issue. We'll also understand their unique place in the created order. We'll have a framework to process bioethical questions by the end of this issue.

02.

THE NATURAL LAW & CREATION

There's a natural tension between objective truth and subjective truth. Unfortunately, America's colleges and universities today preach the fallacy of subjective truth. This pervasive belief stunts the intellectual growth and development of students. Professors erect a walled garden, trapping their students in a fantasy. A widespread belief in subjective truth is a grave threat to society and human progress.

Subjective truth, at its basic level, is relative. It's something that a person believes to be true without regard to reality.

If your child comes home from school one day and tells you that they are a cat, that would be a subjective truth. They can believe that they are a cat. They can meow, pantomime grooming behaviors, and even crawl around your house on all fours.

If you accept their subjective truth and treat them like a cat, there are consequences. For example, if you drive them to school in a kennel, pack a lunch of kibble, and have them lap their water out of a bowl, you will face charges. As much as he protests, your child is not a cat; he's a person.

Objective truth is reality. It's the world as it exists, for good or bad. Regardless of how different people perceive reality, it remains unchanged. If you jump out of a second-story window, the laws of gravity still apply. Gravity applies even if you believe that you can fly like a bird with your whole heart. It is objectively true that humans can't fly on their own.

Objective truth is much less fashionable than subjective truth. It's also much less convenient. If I had the power to create my reality, my life would be much better. I could behave as I pleased, and no one could challenge me. Subjective truth is an excellent thought exercise, but there's no overcoming objective truth. I'm not a cat, I can't fly, and every idea I have isn't perfect.

All humans have inscribed on their hearts something called the Natural Law. The roots of the Natural Law lie in Ancient Greek philosophy. Our modern understanding comes through the extensive development done by St. Thomas Aquinas. Natural Law is our basic concept of right and wrong. It's the moral code God grants us at conception to guide us through life. It helps us discover

and understand God's Will for our lives and serves as a North Star, guiding our decisions.

The brilliance of the Natural Law is its universality. Its fingerprints are present across all humanity. Despite its development by Aquinas, you don't have to be Catholic to know this Law. You don't even have to be religious to have and adhere to this Law. We all instinctively know that we shouldn't kill people, that we shouldn't hurt animals, that we shouldn't steal. We also instinctively know that we should care for our parents, protect the weak, and serve one another.

The Declaration of Independence is one of the most consequential documents ever produced. This blueprint for the American experiment espouses the central tenants of Natural Law. The connection is in the Declaration's most well-known sentence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.

As core to the idea of America, the framers express that there are moral principles that are "self-evident." Moreover, they believed in freedoms "endowed by their Creator" to all citizens. Although it took over a century from the publication of the Declaration for its aspirations to be fully realized, they're unique in political history.

The authors put these ideas to paper in 1776. A majority of the founding fathers voted in favor of adopting them in the founding documents. It was a time in world history when slavery was the standard way of doing business. Racism was systemic, and cruelty was the norm. The Continental Congress espoused these words, ideas, and principles in these conditions. They defined counter-cultural, and they likely knew how far ahead of their time they were. Undeterred, they signed their names to these aspirations, risking their lives to place these ideals at the center of American democracy.

The United States is history's most successful democracy. We've achieved this status despite the challenges that we've overcome. We are a multi-cultural, multi-racial, and multi-religious nation. Our pluralism shows that hegemony doesn't unite us. Our unity is in our belief in these fundamental principles. It's our mutual desire to build a society, government, and nation based on a shared belief in the Natural Law.

The Natural Law sets the human person apart in the created world. It's a shared, universal set of guidelines that instruct our behavior. It's why people in different cultures can agree that the Golden Rule is an excellent philosophy for life.

We can observe that some animals share similar characteristics with humans. It's true, but only in incomplete ways. The Natural Law helps us understand why the human person is the most important part of creation. It's how we know that the human person has dominion over the planet, nature, and animals. We can use our reason and make decisions for the benefit of others. We make these decisions, even if it isn't in our interest.

A corporation could make more money destroying an ecosystem while harvesting natural resources. But the Natural Law tells us that destroying creation unnecessarily is wrong. Instead, the corporation ought to sacrifice some profits to harvest resources sustainably. Our dominion comes with the responsibility of stewardship.

We can organize the created world into three strata: the human person, animals, and nature.

In the created order, man is at the highest strata. He shares in God's image and likeness. He's rational, responsible for the care of his fellow man, and charged with the stewardship of nature. Creation serves man's needs, and man is to treat Creation with care and respect. This is why it's moral to hunt and use animals responsibly but immoral to pollute or waste natural resources.

Animals are in the second strata. They serve specific purposes within their ecosystems, each contributing to ecological balance. For example, hunters control the population, pollinators provide biodiversity, and gatherers promote plant growth. The importance of animals is secondary to the human person, but they're still part of God's creation. We must treat animals with tender care and respect. Killing an animal for sport, only to waste the animal, is an offense against nature. We see an understanding of this even in civil society. Poachers and those who are cruel or neglectful towards animals receive criminal sanctions.

The third strata are the rest of nature. These plants, trees, resources, air, and water fill the Earth and provide it with great beauty. Like man and animals, creation belongs to God's domain. It's the work of His hands and thus is worthy of respect. Nature provides the environment, food, shelter, and water that humans and animals depend on for life.

All people see that the Earth and created things are deserving of respect. Civil society protects animals and regulations to ensure clean air and drinking water. We can commit offenses against animals and nature, but crimes against the human person are the most serious. Nature and animals exist to serve the human person. This reality confers a special responsibility upon the human person to care for God's creation.

The human person's place in creation, and the Natural Law, are two of the primary aspects that set us apart from the rest of the created world. They help us understand why the human person, and its protection and promotion, are fundamental to our existence.

03.

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE AND LIKENESS

The world teems with profound beauty—winter sunrises viewed from the beach and rainbows after intense summer storms. Snow rests on the peaks of mountain ranges, and deserts are full of painted rocks. Lush forests teem with life, and the oceans are full of species, shells, and corals.

Beauty is not only found in nature. A bride and groom walk through town with their wedding party. Newborn babies first open their eyes to capture the gaze of their fathers. The smell of fresh coffee wafts through the air at daybreak, and fresh loaves of bread share their aromas in time for dinner. Looking through the windows of our homes, we can see children at play. Families gather around the Thanksgiving table to share love, joy, and gratitude each November.

The world is a beautiful place.

Beauty is food for the soul. It tells us that life is a precious gift. Goodness also tells us something about the nature of our Creator. God is good, with no evil or malice within Him. Everything that He creates is good. Adding to the pantheon of His good creation is the human person, made in His image and likeness.

The creation stories told in the Book of Genesis are not intended to be a historical record. Jesus often used literary devices to communicate essential truths to His uneducated audience. He did so to make knowledge accessible and comprehensible. God didn't write the Bible. Instead, He inspired its authors. He used the creative capacity of the human mind. Its writers share essential truths through historical characters, stories, and at times, allegories.

There's no contradiction in saying that evolution and creationism are real. Creationism posits that God, as an intelligent designer, brought the created world into being. Evolution holds that, over time, organisms change to adapt to their circumstances. There's ample evidence to support both theories. God chose to use the evolutionary process to fulfill His vision for the created order. The purpose of these pages is not to debate their scientific merits but to think about those essential truths.

The human person is unique in the created order. In *The Natural Law & Creation*, I illustrated a three-strata hierarchy of importance. The human person is the most important, followed by the animal kingdom and nature. The Catholic

Intellectual Tradition and Bible understand the human person as made in the "image and likeness of God." Those five words profoundly impact our understanding of the sacredness of human life and man's place within the created order.

To unpack these five words, let's first look at Jesus. Catholic theology holds that Jesus had two natures: fully man and fully God. Jesus came to earth as a man, not as a coconut tree, not as a grapefruit, not as a lion. He entered the world through the natural cycle of human reproduction. He developed from an embryo to a full term baby to a delivered child. His body had the same systems, worked in the same manner, and had the same bones and joints as your body. He looked like a human because He was human.

The Judeo-Christian understanding of God is very different from many other ancient religions. We understand God to be consistent to a fault and full of love. He creates out of goodness, not violence or boredom. He is a God who keeps His promises and does not deviate from His Word. Especially when compared to the Ancient Greeks, this is revolutionary. The Greek gods see humanity as something to play with. In their boredom, they interfere with humans as entertainment for the residents of Mount Olympus, or to serve the gods' political agendas.

When Jesus took on humanity, He retained His divinity. How this is possible remains a great mystery of faith. But thinking about it, some things become apparent. God is timeless without beginning or end. If He took on humanity and gave up divinity, then He could not be God by definition.

So, as a human person, as Jesus is, you share in the image and likeness of God.

As a human person, Jesus also shared a unity between His body and His soul. Unfortunately, we built many false contradictions constructed between the body and soul. These theories lack a unified vision and miss the essential truth. The body and soul are two sides of the same coin, not two separate dynamics.

The body is the material or physical dynamic of our person. It's the part of us that we can see and touch. The soul is our spiritual dynamic, held within. The soul is the life force that animates the body. You can't be a human person by having only a body. Likewise, you can't be a human person with only a soul. It's the unique combination of body and soul that constitutes you. It's the unity that renders your existence as a human person.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church puts it this way:

The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the "form" of the body: i.e. it is because of its spiritual soul that the body made of matter becomes a living, human body; spirit and matter, in man, are not two natures united, but rather their union forms a single nature.

- Catechism of the Catholic Church #365

This idea of the human person stands in contrast to French philosopher René Descartes's dualism. His thoughts are so influential that they shade the attitudes of many people today. Descartes' famous quote may be familiar to you, "I think; therefore I am."

Here we find another set of five powerful words. In the Cartesian view, the body and soul are distinct and separate things. The soul is the thinking part of the person, while the body is its physical manifestation. It's this understanding that drives attacks on conscience rights and religious liberty.

If the body and soul are separate, in this thinking, then the soul is an optional part of the human person. It's like the human appendix; you can make it through life with or without it. So if the soul is optional and the body is all that matters, why should people be permitted to claim special religious protections or exemptions from otherwise legally mandated things?

The unity of body and soul makes the human person distinct and unique. We share many traits and behaviors with some members of the animal kingdom. But, with body and soul intricately combined, we become rational. We can love and be selfless. The human person can understand our place in the world and the preciousness of life. We can think outside ourselves for the greater good.

A child shares in the image and likeness of their parents. Their physical features, character traits, and mannerisms display a unique blend of their parents. They belong to one another. In the same way, the glory of God is alive in the human person. Made in His image and likeness, the essential truth that the human person belongs to God is clear. Our existence mirrors His. As rational beings and irreplaceable life, we share the capacity to love as God loves. We also share in His dignity. We are all precious and deserving of respect.

Respect for the dignity of the human person is the cornerstone of a moral society. With it, we're able to make decisions and judgments that promote the common good and defend that dignity. Moreover, the human person's

existence, marked with the image of God, sets them apart as having innate worth. Existence confers this special dignity, not productivity, satisfaction, or utility measurements.

A just society only exists if absolute respect of the human person is complete: at all stages, in all places, and in every circumstance. It's our responsibility to challenge the flawed views of the human person, especially when they provide legal avenues to attack and destroy life. All life is sacred, and we must protect all people, especially the vulnerable.

04.

A LONGITUDINAL LIFE

Discourse in the modern era is on life support. Most of us only experience debates in the context of a political election cycle. Those aren't debates; they're 90-minute campaign ads mixed with quibbles and shouting. Insecure positions and weak logic cause positions to collapse at even a cursory challenge. It's a sad commentary on modern thought.

Ancient Greek philosophical texts often take the form of recorded debates. Known as dialogues, the great thinkers of the ancient world gathered in the public squares and schools to debate a single idea. (My favorite is *On the Nicomachean Ethics*.) What stands out most to the readers of these dialogues is the willingness of all parties to have their positions challenged and examined. Going through inquiry and debate invites everyone to consider their position and rationale. They gather new information and strengthen their arguments and logic. The result is a more thorough understanding of an idea.

A common thread in today's debate over the human person relies on assigning their worth using a standard of independence. This subjective standard misses the point. The nature of humanity is interdependence. We rely on one another to help meet our own needs. I want to illustrate and explore the life of a person. At each stage, we'll see how, despite varying levels of independence, we all rely on others to help us meet our needs.

His life begins at the moment of conception, the fertilization of an egg resulting in a single cell. At that moment, there's the release of a bright flash of light, a poetic beginning to a new life. We know that this is a new life because we can observe a DNA structure that is both human and totally unique from his mother's DNA. If given adequate shelter and nutrition, he has within him all the biological plans necessary to grow, develop, and mature.

He relies on his mother in his first moments and months of growth and development. A mother's body changes to provide sanctuary, nutrition, and proper temperature. In the first hours after birth, he reinforces the connection to his mother through skin-to-skin contact. This experience confers tangible medical benefits as he transitions from womb to world. His body temperature regulates, his heart rate stabilizes, blood oxygenation increases, and digestion improves.

He grows by large percentages at home over the following weeks and months. Yet, despite this impressive trajectory, he's still unable to do much for himself. His mother monitors his schedule, checks his weight, changes his clothing, provides nutrition, and watches his safety.

Over the next several years, he gains more independence. This fantastic process plays out before his parents' eyes. Slowly, communication evolves from stares to smiles to babbles. He rolls over, sits up, and pulls to stand. He first rakes items towards himself, then pinches and picks them up. Soon, he opens cabinets and empties their contents. One day, he stands on his own two legs and takes those first steps, a uniquely human attribute in the world of mammals. Yet, despite this mind-blowing process, he still requires the whole care of his parents. He needs their help achieving adequate nutrition, maintaining shelter, learning, and staying safe.

The teenage years bring on more independence and still more parental care. The adolescent brain is dangerous, believing itself invincible in a world of perils. In this period of life, he experiences new and complex events. Struggling to understand them, his parents help him process and understand these novel experiences. He makes plenty of mistakes which lead to correction and learning. Unable to maintain a household of his own, he continues to rely on his parents to meet most of his material needs.

Early adulthood is the time in which his independence peaks. Despite living on his own after college, he's still dependent on others. From time to time, he'll call home for advice and help. Alone in the world, he'll feel that pull towards community and connection, and he'll stay involved in family life. He might even use his vacation time to go home for holidays and celebrations.

Marriage is his next milestone, the point at which he entrusts his well-being to his wife. The newlyweds begin their journey with one another, meeting each spouse's needs. As they welcome children of their own, the crowning glory of their marriage, they'll work together to care for their children.

Thanks to advances in medicine, his parents live longer than his grandparents. Soon his parents will come to depend more on him. They need his help with small things like errands or coordinating doctor's appointments. He may need to help them with their blind spots, like identifying when they need higher care.

One day, many years later, he'll grow old, and his children will care for him. One day, after a long and prosperous life, his body will fail under the weight of its frailty, and he will die a natural death. This sorrowful moment comes for us all,

but out of sorrow comes beauty. He lived, shared, and enjoyed his life with his family and friends. He touched many who came into contact with him, and his life was uninterrupted. He had the dignity of natural birth and natural death.

When we chart out the life of a human person, from the moment of conception until their natural death, we see a confluence of independence and dependence. We're always in need of the love and tender care of others. So we're never independent, and that's a beautiful thing. True independence can slide into isolation, one of the most dangerous conditions for the human mind and spirit.

Throughout his life, his body took on many forms. It started as a single totipotent cell. Totipotent is a name assigned to a cell that can form into many different types of specialized cells. Cell division occurred time and time again as his body grew. We could see his physical form take a familiar shape at his birth. He developed over the months and years, rapidly outgrowing clothing all along the way.

At each cell division, his body followed those same blueprints present in his first moment of life. The instructions encoded in his DNA guided his development as old cells died and new cells developed. At his death, the blueprints remained essentially unchanged. At every stage, he maintained adequate nutrition and shelter, and his life continued.

His life ran along a horizontal line, always progressing forward through time. Yet, no matter where he fell on the spectrum, he remained, at his core, a human person. He was a young man and an old man, a new dad and an old grandfather. He was an avid athlete and a homebound senior citizen, but he remained, in all seasons, a human person.

What this life illustrates is an expansive definition of a human. It's a definition that's unpopular in political and academic circles. It's a definition that precludes abortion, euthanasia, racism, sexism, hatred, bigotry, and violence of any kind. Life is complicated and grey. In contrast, the reality of the human person is as simple as it gets.

We shouldn't let biology and science be the final authority on what makes a human person. After all, a physical body is only part of what makes a human person. Some human persons are tall and some are short, we all have different body builds, and have different complexions. An Iraqi War Veteran who suffered injuries in battle and had an arm amputated is no less a human person than their neighbor with all four limbs. The human body lacks uniformity in these examples, yet the essence of the human person remains the common thread.

If we were to let science be the final authority on what constitutes the human person, we'd miss out on some of the best aspects of humanity. For example, there's no biological way to check for or identify virtue. You can't test positive for kindness, humility, and selflessness. Virtues are essential to a life well-lived, yet science is blind to them. Biology can help us organize our world's facts, understand the things that we see, and make sense of life. However, we should remember that it only confers part of the knowledge we need.

The human person is more than the sum of their parts. It's a mistake to define the human person or define their worth on a physical basis. The essence of a human person confers their personhood. They possess a unique and unrepeatable DNA and personality, a physical body, and a soul. The human person is like a rare painting. You can see and observe a painting, but it's hard to pinpoint or grasp the beauty that it possesses. You can see the colors and feel the texture of the canvas, but you can't touch its beauty. It's intangible while remaining genuine. It's the same way that we should approach each human person. We should appreciate them for who they are, their beauty, and their inherent worth. Their existence, the result of the remarkable process of human development, is something beautiful.

Our society endures turmoil today, with much of it revolving around the many -ism's from throughout history. Defining the human person based on their bodily features is the intellectual foundation of many of these -isms.

If we refuse to accept that all human persons are worthy of dignity and respect, from the moment of conception until natural death, we give injustice an opening to exploit. If one class of people, such as those in the womb, can have their humanity reduced and injured, why not people with a particular disability or skin tone? Why not people who think in a specific way or worship a god that we don't recognize? This toxic worldview will ensure that misery and human suffering endures until it's defeated.

The bulwark against injustice, grave offenses against people, and crimes against humanity is the expansive view of the human person that accepts, appreciates, and celebrates the worth of every human life.

It's regrettable to see our society fall into the trap of utilitarianism in our legal code. Abortion and euthanasia enjoy legal protections while their victims endure dreadful outcomes. Although it may be disheartening to experience this shift, remaining hopeful and engaged is essential. We may not be able to change the world, but we can impact the corner that we occupy. We can first live exemplary lives of service that respect the dignity and worth of all people. We can teach

our children about this simple truth of life through our words and actions. We can advocate through our legislatures and our vote for the universal respect of the dignity of the human person.

The simplest of things can be the hardest to understand, especially when they require us to experience discomfort. Accepting that all people are worthy of dignity and respect requires us to live with the virtue of the saints and the unconditional love of Jesus. That's the work of a lifetime but work worth undertaking.

Human life is precious and delicate. No matter their place on the longitudinal line of life, every human person has inherent worth. This worth is separate from their physical being, intellectual or economic value. They have worth because of who they are and what they are. No law, no government, no culture can take that worth away.

The growth and development of a child through the various stages of pregnancy is challenging and precarious. Not only do many parents struggle to achieve pregnancy, maintaining a pregnancy can be just as difficult.

Our duty as human persons is to protect the most vulnerable among us, especially new life in its earliest stages. Vulnerability continues after reaching viability, the point at which a child can survive outside of the womb, albeit with intensive medical intervention.

05.

THE GREAT EQUALIZER

Managing screen time is tough. I try to limit my kids to 30-60 minutes of television time throughout the day. I'm inconsistent at hitting that mark, but I still aspire to that goal. When I turn on the TV, I almost always turn on a show from PBS Kids. There's more than enough mindless programming out there aimed at kids. Watching TV is a passive activity, but if they pay attention, they might learn something watching PBS. Unfortunately, I broke the cardinal rule of not pre-screening the things that my kids watch.

We were stilling at dinner one evening, and my first-grader asked me about the color of his skin. It was a surprising question because children don't think in those terms. Several questions later, I learned that a recent show on PBS Kids introduced him to the idea of race. The show attempted to explore the history of slavery in the United States. He watched that episode and walked away with the idea that there might be something wrong with him, that he might be a bad person, because of the color of his skin. I got up from the table and deleted the PBS Kids app from the TV.

We're in an era of polarization and division. It's the human story. In our brokenness, we fail to integrate our aspirations into our lives. We fail to recognize the inherent worth of every human person, from their first moment of life until their natural death. Instead, we sort, organize, assume, and divide one another into groups based on every kind of characteristic.

There are plenty of opportunities to group people: by race, sex, religion, ethnicity, national origin, political views, education level, marital status, disability status, diagnosis, homeownership status, geographic region, zip code, employment status, field of study, job title, age, wealth, sexuality, hobby, idiosyncrasies, music tastes, and any other wedge that we can find.

Things are no worse now than they were in years past. Every generation has its struggles. The struggle will continue as long as the involvement of humans in society continues. The only difference is that we have to contend with these issues in the omnipresence of the Internet. We can know far more about each other than ever before, with updates streaming in by the minute.

In a sense, these divisions are natural. After all, each human person is an unrepeatable, irreplaceable individual. We have our unique blend of interests,

hobbies, lifestyles, and worldviews. The human brain likes to sort, organize, and bring order to the disorder.

In another sense, these divisions have real negative potential. In seeking their ends and objectives, bad actors use them to sow chaos and tear at society. They beat the drum of differences so loud that we lose sight of the things that bring us together in the noise.

Part of this polarization is of our doing. Any time we entertain the idea that the dignity of the human person isn't paramount, we allow ourselves to question all aspects of it. If we can kill a child in the womb, why can't we kill a useless older person? If a person of one faith or race isn't deserving of respect, what other characteristics can we ignore?

I have to care as much about my parents as I do about Jeff Bezos, the world's richest man. I have to be as concerned about my wife as I am about an earthquake victim in Haiti or Tonga. I have to love and cherish my child as much as I love and cherish a persecuted minority somewhere in Asia. It's a tall order, indeed.

The fact is, our existence as human persons is the great equalizer. It's the only universal thing we share with every other human person. Our challenge is to embrace it, live it, and act on it.

06.

FAITH, REASON, & THE HUMAN PERSON

The human person is beautiful. Each person possesses a soul, intellect, and reason, the intricate fusion of the physical and spiritual. We find our source and purpose in our sharing in the image and likeness of God. Our soul works in concert with the physical nature of our body to form our personhood.

The essential element of the human person is the soul. The soul isn't a physical component of our body. The soul is the principle that animates the body. It's the foundation; the soul is what makes human life so precious. The soul is what makes you, you. The human body has unique identifiers, such as fingerprints and DNA. Similarly, your soul is unique to you and unrepeatable.

A human person has two requirements: a body and a soul. The creation of body and soul, and their fusion together, co-occur at the moment of conception. A new human body begins with the first cell, infused with a soul, and a new human person now exists.

The genius of this idea of the human person is that it treats all people as equal. It isn't a theoretical or romantic concept of equality. It's an idea with practical applications that always resolves bioethical questions to benefit the human person. Likewise, it promotes deference, respect, equality, civility. Not only that, but it protects the weakest and most vulnerable among us.

To be a human person, you don't need to have a perfect body, intellect, or spirituality. You only need a soul and a body. Your innate value remains in sickness or health, poverty or wealth, incapacitated, unconscious, maimed, disabled, or receiving a Gold Medal on the Olympic podium. That value is unchanging and unchangeable throughout your life. No action that you take can diminish your inherent worth. No effort by any other person, group, organization, or government can lessen or negate the dignity and value of the human person. No circumstance can impact this status: your intrinsic value is constant and complete.

In every time, culture, and place, the dignity of the human person is something that requires active defense. Unfortunately, our flawed nature leads us to selfishness. We tacitly approve of the degradation of other human persons, so long as we're not affected in the short term. We turn a blind eye to genocide in foreign lands, the plight of migrants, racial hatred, the false legality of abortion, or the excessive usage of the death penalty because we're

comfortable. We do the same when we ignore people on the street, neighbors who need our help, or coworkers who are the subject of water-cooler gossip. The universality of the human person means that the degradation of any single human person affects us all.

The human person has a definitive beginning. Before conception, two separate cells with different DNA sequences exist, unrelated to one another. At conception, a new, single cell with unique DNA exists. This new DNA sequence is a clear, scientific marker; a new human life begins and that human life is infused with a new soul. We owe this new life reverence, respect, and protection.

Society's attitudes towards faith are different from even a half-century ago. This massive, rapid change is sobering, especially given its enormous personal costs. What was once a cornerstone of communal life is now met with suspicion and disdain. The orthodoxy of modern rationalism has supplanted faith's role in the town square. As a result, our souls are weary and sad, unable to recognize what we've given up.

This confused attitude is new, even in a country as academically liberal as the United States. The first institutions of higher learning focused on religious instruction. Even into the late 1800s, Yale University's mission was the education of the clergy.

The Catholic Church established the first university at Bologna in 1088. At a point in history when only the aristocracy had the benefit of education, the Church boldly codified the right of all peoples to access knowledge. That institutional principle led to the establishment of primary and secondary schools across the globe.

Rather than try to subjugate the faithful through ignorance, the Catholic Church recognized the importance of education in man's life. It's a vital aspect of the faithful's journey to know God. The Church doesn't seek mindless followers. On the contrary, it relishes its strong intellectual tradition, formed by thinkers, writers, and scientists throughout the ages. It's a tradition that continues to expand today. The application of faith and reason yields true freedom.

Faith and reason rely upon one another for the fulfillment and empowerment of the human person. Nurturing our spirituality enables us to live healthier, more balanced lives. Developing and enhancing our sense of reason opens up our minds and propels humanity forward. As our reason grows, our interaction with the Divine deepens. It's through reason that we understand the

world in which we live and see the genius of God's design. Through reason, we come to know ourselves better and engage with the dignity of the human person.

Faith provides healthy boundaries for reason. Faith orients reason by giving it a moral code to direct its work. It gives reason its "why." It insists that the power, resources, and products of reason aim for the higher goods of man. Faith teaches us to cast off labels and divisions. We're no longer black or white, Christian or Jew, American or Korean; we're children of God and members of His family. With this groundwork established, reason helps us see the truth. All human persons are equal, sharing in the weaknesses of humanity and striving to live a good life.

To reject either faith or reason is to reject an essential component of humanity. Faith and reason are united in their essence, building upon one another to the benefit of humanity.

The human person is a magnificent reality gifted with cognition and reason itself. Charged with stewardship of the created world, the human person acts to serve the greater good. The human person is complete, integrated, and unrepeatable.

The human person has innate worth and dignity; their worth comes from their existence, unrelated to features, interests, and utility. The precious nature of this reality calls us back to the truth. Every life is sacred, meaningful, and valuable, from the moment of conception until natural death.

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Chet Collins is an at-home dad who spends most of his waking hours taking care of four small children.

Chet graduated with a degree in Philosophy from Franciscan University of Steubenville. He and his wife, Alison, have been married for nine years.

Alison is a physician, and their relationship followed her through the training pipeline. They've spent many dinners, late nights, and road trips discussing bioethics and its intersection with philosophy and Catholic theology.

Chet started blogging in 2013, has published three books. He's now combining this experience to write and publish this magazine.