

Being Human

Prepared by Gerald Gleeson

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Selected Highlights

John L Smith

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Chapter 1. Created and Evolved

Each and every human being is a unique person created in the image of God.

A philosophy of being or existence

- PHILOSOPHY – absolute, ultimate, foundational
 - *Why* finite beings exist at all
- SCIENCE – cosmology, biology, evolution
 - *How* and *why* the universe is unfolding as it is
- Thomas Aquinas: God is “Subsistent Being itself” – sheer “TO-BE”, the limitless, actual perfection of all perfections (including the perfection of Personhood), the creative source and origin of all that is.

What is it to be a person?

- Person = “an individual substance of a rational nature”
 - *some-thing* - individual
 - *some-one* – reflective, self-conscious, relational
- *What?* “*nature*” = instance of a kind
- *Who?* a particular someone
- “Person” can be used *analogously* of individuals of various kinds – human, angel, God

The modern understanding of person

- Human personhood understood in isolation from God
- Self-sufficient source of meaning and truth
- John Locke (1632-1704) made a distinction
 - *Human* living organism of a certain species
 - *Person* ... consciousness which is inseparable from thinking and essential to it
 - Omits principle of *substance*

Chapter 2. Bodily and Spiritual

Human persons are at once both material and spiritual beings: we belong to a physical universe, and yet we are destined for relationship with God, now and for eternity. We are finite beings with a capacity for God who is infinite.

The “spirituality” of human intelligence

- “Spiritual” = *non-physical*, not explainable in material or scientific terms
- We are able to grasp the intelligibility of the world in a *universal non-material* way
 - The human intellect is not a material entity
 - Not reducible to the neuro-physiological activity of the brain

The “spirituality” of the human person

- Critical activities manifesting our human nature
 - *Judging* what is true
 - *Loving* or willing what is good
- The secret of human personhood is the presence of a *non-material (i.e. spiritual) principle*, the soul, which is embodied in the actual bodily life and activity of a human being
- My soul is not me but it is the “spiritual key” to the person I am, and the key to my continuing to be after I die.

Person and nature

- Modern view - a prejudice!
 - emphasis on subjective experience – consciousness and rational agency
 - a quality that beings may possess or not, or possess in varying degrees
- Catholic view - cannot separate personhood and human nature
 - being a fellow human being does not come in degrees
 - human beings are to be respected as persons from the beginning of their existence

The human destiny

- Persons created “in the image of God”
 - for his or her own sake
 - to know and love God for all eternity
- A drive within us towards the infinite
 - prayer, fasting and almsgiving open a person to relationship with God
- Discipline (especially prayer) if we are to actualise our heart’s desire for God.
- We are made for relationship, above all with God, who is relational in the trinity of persons.

Chapter 3. Free and Responsible

We are moral beings commanded to love God and neighbour, and thereby to acknowledge and pursue the truth about what is good.

The mystery of sin

- *The being of sin* in a world in which God is the source of all being.
- Sin can only be an absence of *being*, a failure to choose the right good
- Moral evil is the absence of the good that ought to be present, or ought to be realised in our actions

Conscience

- The Church's teaching seeks to hold in tension a number of truths
 - Each person is responsible for his own moral decisions, guided by his best judgment, discerning the good to be done and the evil to be avoided in a particular situation
 - a person's own conscience judgments do not *create* moral truth
 - Obligation to form one's conscience, to know what conduct is required in a given situation

Formation of Conscience

- Involves openness to the truth and a willingness to embrace the truth, looking to the wisdom of one's community and moral traditions
- Doing "my best" will only be good enough if I am a good enough person who strives to know and love what is right
- For Catholics openness means doing one's best to think with the Church and to make its teachings one's own.
- Guided by the Holy Spirit and the revealed Word of God, the moral tradition of the Church is more extensive than our own reasoning capacity

The agent perspective

- Ethical reasoning should be conducted from *the first-person* perspective of the moral agent – *what should I do?*
- Persons become themselves through their free and deliberate actions (Veritatis Splendour)
- "Whatever I choose to do will be right" trivialises freedom and eliminates the significance of choice
- Our understanding of human dignity and true human fulfilment is crucial because it provides the basis for what we understand to be right and wrong human choices

Chapter 4. Individual and Social

We are social beings called to establish and maintain just and faithful relationships with all other members of the human family.

Respect for other persons

- Justice: to render whatever is rightly due to others as fellow human beings
- The proper exercise of *my* freedom requires me to respect the freedom of others and, indeed, to respect the rights of others and their conscientious judgments even if I believe them to be mistaken

Individual and society

- A second duality
 - self-responsible individuals
 - social beings
- Dependence on one another
- Dependence on God
- Highest personal act – gift of oneself to another – “unless a grain of wheat dies...does it yield a rich harvest”

The common good

- Balanced relationship between individual and society
 - social reality (our dependencies)
 - conditions and benefits that make this social reality possible
- An ideal for the sake of which an individual should, when appropriate, be willing to subordinate his or her own particular goods
- Our society – individualism, consumerism and “market forces” – tends to exaggerate the individual and his/her rights

Chapter 5. Male and Female

We are sexual beings whose fulfilment lies in the gift of oneself to another. Genital sexuality finds its true expression in the commitment of marriage and the procreation of new human life.

Concept of gender

- *factual* difference of male and female is embodied in cultural differences
- western culture – greater fluidity in gender roles
 - corrective to forms of unjust discrimination

Catholic understanding will address recent cultural changes

- Catholic conviction
 - polarity between male and female is a key feature of the way God has ordered both human nature and much of the natural world
 - we are men and women, not simply persons who happen to have a male or female body, thus in the normal course of psychosexual development, one’s sex shapes one’s personal identity and becomes essential to who one is

From sexual difference to “the nuptial meaning” of the human body

- Sexual difference signals the incompleteness of each and every human being
- Longing for wholeness and completion
- Nuptial meaning: The Man and The Woman, in the very structure of their bodies and personalities, are destined for a reciprocal relationship of love and fidelity, a union of faithful loving that is ordered to the procreation of new life
- A communion that is impossible to either alone
- Does not imply that men and women can only become complete and worthwhile persons in marriage
- True completion (i.e. fulfilment) for every human being fundamentally consists in the gift of oneself in love to others and to God