

My Father's House

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Christian Anthropology **The Nature and Dignity of the Human Person**

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John Paul II

One of the great legacies that Pope John Paul II will leave to the Church and to the world is a deeper appreciation and understanding of the dignity of the human person. When Pope John Paul came to this country, he said to a group of young people on October 3, 1979, "When you wonder about the mystery of yourselves, look at Christ, who is the one who gives meaning to our lives."

John Paul said on many other occasions that it is Jesus Christ who fully reveals man to himself. In other words, without Christ, we cannot fully understand or realize who we are. To the pagan, we are simply a psychological and physical construct. But to the Christian, we are body, soul and spirit with our spirits in dwelt by the Holy Spirit. We are children of God. We are other Christs. We are temples of the Spirit of Christ. We are fearfully and wonderfully made - both naturally and supernaturally. We have a God-given dignity with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities that flow from that.

This notion of personhood Pope John Paul proclaimed when he spoke to the United Nations. Once you understand the God-given, awesome, dignity of the human person, all the inalienable rights and privileges that flow from that are also fully understood.

Thomas Jefferson

After the Reformation, Martin Luther had done great damage to the notion of personhood. He understood human nature as so flawed by sin that it could do nothing good. He said that even a mother kissing her own child was sinning because she, like the rest of us, was a completely sinful being. Therefore, we can only put all our faith in the already finished work of Jesus who alone was good and holy. Robert Bellarmine corrected this notion of personhood. He taught what Catholic theology has always taught; namely, that although man infected by original sin was weak and had tendencies to sin, nevertheless, he was redeemed by the grace of Christ, which did three things. Grace healed human nature, it perfected human nature and restored human nature to supernature as a child of God. Both Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin studied the writings of Robert Bellarmine and understood that the human person is endowed by the Creator with

certain inalienable rights among which are life, liberty, pursuit of happiness, as well as the right to a just wage, proper living conditions, to suitable work, to freedom and happiness.

The World at Large

The world at large has lost this notion of the dignity of the human person. First came Martin Luther, then came Sigmund Freud. Freud held that the human person is a cesspool of libidinous instincts screeching to be unleashed. He held that only the superego, that is the mores of a culture kept these instincts in check. What a low opinion of man. B.F. Skinner was even worse. He heard that man was nothing more than a Pavlovian dog, who simply responded to external stimuli with no internal integrity. Adler was more positive when he said that man is a social being who responds to the inspirations of society. And Carl Rodgers and Abraham Maslow claimed that the inner well of a person was "instintoid" good. Karl Marx claimed that man received all his rights and privileges from the state. And Lenin held that man received his rights and privileges as a member of the Proletariat. Much of American mankind considers a person's worth simply in terms of physical beauty, fame or fortune.

The True Nature of Man

But man's true nature is that which is given to him by Christ. The most sacred Humanity of Christ casts a light that enlightens the being and the life of each of us, because it is only in Christ that we can recognize the totally immeasurable value of the human person. It is Christ alone who gives meaning and definition to our existence. The greatness of the human person derives from the spiritual reality of the soul, his divine affiliation, his eternal destiny, all of which he has received from God. This places him above the whole of created nature. The dignity and immense respect that he merits are granted to him at the moment of conception and are the foundation of the right to the inviolability of life. The most important title bestowed upon human dignity is that of being the only reality of visible creation that God has loved for itself, creating it in His own image and likeness and raising it to the order of grace.

Furthermore, the human person assumed a new value after the Son of God, through His incarnation, took on our nature, and gave His life for all men. There isn't a single soul that remains outside of Christ's love. Therefore, we should not withhold our respect and consideration from a single person. We should look around us at the people we see and speak to each day, and consider in God's presence that they are other Christs. And that which we do to them, we do to Him.