

“RESTLESS HEARTS AND RIGHT THINKING”: CREATION AND THE HUMAN PERSON

Last week, I shared the Vatican II reflection on the dogma that we humans are created in God’s image. Its implications are critical: “This likeness reveals that man, who is the only creature **on earth** which **God willed** for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of himself.” (GS, 24) We cannot “find” ourselves except through a sincere gift of self. What **exactly** does this **entail**? Earlier (GS,19) the Council fathers quoted the famous line of St. Augustine’s *Confessions*: “You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our **heart is restless** until it rests in you.” (I,1) By December 1965, the restlessness of humanity was evident. In November 1965, the U.S. lost 240 service members in Vietnam, the **deadliest month** to date in the war. By 1967, it spiked to 1000 per month. The world was at a crossroads—morality was precarious, the sexual revolution imminent.

Gaudium et Spes sought to address **existential questions** of life and faith within the context of contemporary society. This needs to be our focus in every age, including our own. The challenges are different today, though I would argue the **restlessness** has only **increased**. Our societal confusion about who we are as human beings and how we fit onto God’s plan is largely to blame. A confused anthropology yields bad fruit. *Imago Dei* refers to the dogma that the human person is **qualitatively different** from all other creatures on earth. It is a theme central to biblical revelation. We are different, both because of the immortal soul breathed into us at our birth, as well as that we were created in relation to one another, not as isolated individuals. In 2004, the **International Theological Commission** (ITC) published an extremely **insightful document** on the doctrine of *imago Dei*.

While not exactly “**bedtime reading**” you may wish to **access it here**. It states: “Created in the image of God to share in the communion of Trinitarian love, human beings occupy a unique place in the universe according to the divine plan: they enjoy the privilege of sharing in the divine governance of visible creation.” (para #57) The document stresses that this occurs “by caring responsibly for the natural world (including animals and the environment), and by guarding their own biological integrity.” (para # 61). By this, the Council **did not** intend to signal that we are an end to ourselves. As St. Augustine wrote: “But man is said to be after the image, on account, as we have said, of the inequality of the likeness; and therefore after *our* image, that man might be the image of the Trinity; not equal to the Trinity as the Son is equal to the Father, but approaching to it, as has been said, by a **certain likeness**.” (*De Trinitate* 7.6.12)

In the early church life was interconnected, the universe conceived in hierarchical terms. In discourses about the human person, history, philosophy, science, theology and psychology were intertwined. History begins with God creating and concludes with Christ. The soul is the **life principle** of the body. The **classical** understanding spoke of the juxtaposition of body and soul, often with the soul seen as superior. This is one reason why **some** early Christian thinkers **erred** in denigrating the body, placing the two elements of the human person in needless competition. Early Christian theology tried to **separate** itself from the notion that the body is not the **soul’s prison**. Early Christian anthropology was one of **unity**, envisioning the human person in relation to God and discerning a capacity for participation in the Trinitarian life of God. “Biblical anthropology excludes mind-body dualism. It speaks of man as a whole.” (ITC, #28)

Since Christ is the perfect image of God (see 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3), for us to participate in that Trinitarian life demands that we understand our calling and appreciate our dignity. This cannot occur if we are confused about our place in God’s creation. There is an **ontological difference** between us and animals because only the human person is created in the image of God and God has given him sovereignty over the animal world (Gen. 1:26, 28; Gen. 2:19-20). Animals simply can never participate in the Trinitarian life of God. In a 1985 interview, **PETA** (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) co-founder **Ingrid Newkirk** said, “Animal liberationists do not separate out the human animal, so there is no rational basis for saying that a human being has special rights. A rat is a pig is a dog is a boy. They’re all mammals.” Not! Admittedly this is an **extreme** position, but it highlights a fundamental **flaw** in human anthropology.

The other fundamental **lesson** from the Book of Genesis is that God created us “male and female,” and this **distinction** too has come under increasing **attack** in contemporary society. Pope Francis has spoken several times of an “ideological colonization” perpetrated especially by the West, forcing its views and values on poorer societies. He has seen the teaching in schools of **gender theory** an example of this. I admit I have been behind the curve on addressing these issues and hope to rectify that. For now, a Christian anthropology seizes on the unique character of the human person, created male and female in God’s image and likeness.

- Entitled “You Will Be My Witnesses,” **Archbishop Hebda’s** Post-Synodal Pastoral Letter is available online beginning today. To **download** on your computer, simply use the QR code in the sidebar on page 7. We hope to have paper copies available soon.
- Then there were **five**. Amid my columns about Vatican Council II, it is sobering to note that just five **bishops** who participated in at least **one session** of **Vatican II** are still **living**. Consecrated in their **30’s** mostly as missionary bishops, they hail from Mexico, South Korea, India, Italy and Nigeria. Among the five, one is a centenarian, the other four nonagenarians. And **Francis Cardinal Arinze** eventually became Prefect of the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship.
- Next week, I will present the parish annual **financial report** in this column. I encourage you to read it. Who knows, you might just find it more interesting than the “usual fare” in these pages!
- The **colder weather** has arrived with a vengeance, the temperature plummeting from 68° to 25° in just fifteen hours on November 10! Welcome to **heating season!** I pray that you may consider a **generous gift** to defray the costs associated with heating the Church to a comfortable level. We seek to be frugal by adjusting the zones for periods (e.g. Masses) when the Church is occupied by more people.
- It was most heartening to see how many remembered their deceased loved ones with communal Mass intentions for **All Souls Day**. Thanks to our choir, the **Victoria Requiem** was stunning— may even more participate next year. It is worth celebrating the All Saints/All Souls cycle with appropriate solemnity.
- At today’s 10:00 a.m. Mass, we welcome and recognize all who are **prayerfully contemplating** joining the Church this Easter. It is a process and never an easy decision. Please pray for all our **RCIA** candidates and catechumens. This year’s class is both inquisitive and fun— a great combination!

Sincerely in Christ,

Fr. John L. Ubel,
Rector



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