

*The Knights of Columbus presents
The Luke E. Hart Series
Basic Elements of the Catholic Faith*

THE HUMAN PERSON

PART ONE • SECTION FOUR OF
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

*What does a Catholic believe?
How does a Catholic worship?
How does a Catholic live?*

Based on the
Catechism of the Catholic Church

by
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A WORD ABOUT THIS SERIES

This booklet is one of a series of 30 that offer a colloquial expression of major elements of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Pope John Paul II, under whose authority the *Catechism* was first released in 1992, urged such versions so that each people and each culture can appropriate its content as its own.

The booklets are not a substitute for the *Catechism*, but are offered only to make its contents more accessible. The series is at times poetic, colloquial, playful, and imaginative; at all times it strives to be faithful to the Faith. Following are the titles in our series.

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SECTION 4: THE HUMAN PERSON

Note: “Man” does not mean “males,” or “males more than females.” Despite this fact, most publishers today strictly censor the traditionally inclusive use of “man” or “he” – a use found in all English translations of the Bible, all the documents of the Church, and all the great secular books in the history of Western civilization.

This censorship is usually insisted on out of respect for the strong feelings of influential feminists, and perhaps in guilt and reparation for the many real injustices done in the past by men to women.

Traditional language is maintained in this booklet, not out of any desire to exclude women or to deny the full equality between men and women (a reality affirmed in the Bible), but because of the conviction that past injustices against women are not atoned for by injustices against language.

In the English language, the word “man” does double duty; it means two things. For English has only one word (“man”) where many other languages have two. In Latin,

for instance, *homo* means “human being” and *vir* means “male human being.” In Greek, *anthropos* and *aner* bear the same distinction. When English writers said, “God and man” they did *not* mean “God and males.”

Why not say “God and humanity” then? Because “God and man” not only sounds better than “God and humanity,” but it means something different. “Man” is a concrete term, like “God;” but “humanity” is an abstract term, like “divinity.”

1. The dignity of man today

No century in history spoke more about the dignity of man than the twentieth. Yet no century in history threatened the dignity of man more, both in theory and in practice.

Threatened it in theory because the three thinkers who had the most influence on the twentieth century – Darwin, Marx, and Freud – all reduced man to something soulless: either an accidentally-evolved clever ape, or a cog in the economic State machine, or a suppressed sex maniac.

Threatened it in practice because of the twentieth century’s most dramatic invention, genocide: the deliberate murder of over 100 million innocent people, more than the entire population of the world for most of man’s history. And not just by Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. In “free” America, more than one and a half million human beings a year continue to be slaughtered in the womb.

The cause of this human carnage should be obvious to any Christian or Jew or Muslim. Once “God is dead” to any society or ideology, so is his image in man. *“The Abolition*

of Man” (the title of a prophetic book by C. S. Lewis) follows from the abolition of God. For God is the source of all life, and when any culture says No to God, it says No to life and becomes what Pope John Paul II has dared to call a “culture of death.”

The defense of man is thus bound up with the defense of God. They are inseparable. “If anyone says ‘I love God’ and hates his brother, he is a liar” (1 Jn 4:20).

2. The basis for the dignity of man

Equally, if anyone says, “I love man” and hates God, he is a liar. For a great building will not stand without a strong foundation. Everyone in our culture affirms “the dignity of man,” but what is its foundation? What prevents its collapse?

The Catholic answer is clear: “Of all visible creatures, only man is ‘able to know and love his creator.’²¹⁹ . . . [H]e alone is called to share, by knowledge and love, in God’s own life. It was for this end that he was created, and this is the fundamental reason for his dignity” (C 356). This is one of the most crucial and challenging sentences in the *Catechism* for our time.

Man’s *dignity* rests on his *destiny*. He is not just from the dust and for the dust, but from God and for God.

Even the theory of evolution agrees with the Genesis account in seeing man as the culmination of the natural process. We naturally wonder what is the point and purpose of the whole universe; the answer is not just its gases and galaxies, but the man who asks that question. The

galaxies are only the stage, the setting for the play; we are the actors.

The universe is a great cathedral. The stars and seas are God's holy pictures on the walls to raise the mind of man to worship and adore his Creator. Without God the cathedral loses its meaning, its dignity, and its destiny. So does man the worshipper.

Man has value and dignity because he is a holy thing, like the Eucharist. In man too, Christ is truly hidden.

3. Christ as the meaning of man

“In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of man truly becomes clear”²²⁴ (C 359). Man sees his own meaning and destiny much more clearly in Christ than in any of his own ideas or dreams, philosophies, or psychologies, ethical or social ideals. Christ is the answer to the most important and challenging question we can ask: What am I supposed to be? What is the meaning of my life? To this question we have not just an abstract answer, a *theory*, but a concrete answer, a *fact*, the man Jesus Christ. He is *data* for man's knowledge of himself.

To understand this concrete datum, let us consult our written data, the Bible (both Christ and Scripture are called “the Word of God”).

Christians read the Old Testament in light of the New, as a farmer interprets a seed in light of its fruit. So we should expect to find Christ at the center of the Old Testament too. And we do, starting with God's creation of the universe and of man.

Genesis 1 says God created the universe by his Word, but it does not say what God's Word is. The New Testament does. Jesus Christ is the Word of God (Jn 1:1-14).

Genesis 1:26-27 says God made man "in the image of God," but it does not say what the image of God is. The New Testament does. Jesus Christ is the image of God (Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49). Man's dignity is based on the fact that he is created to be like Christ.

In this fallen world, that means Christ's Cross: self-giving love culminating in death. And in the next world it means the full glory of Christ's resurrection body.

4. Christ as the basis for human solidarity

Man finds his meaning in Christ not only as an example or ideal to imitate, but as the "Head" of a "Body" that is organically one, and one with its Head, just as the thing between your shoulders is organically one with the body it directs. We are Christ's "members" (1 Cor 12:14-27; Rom 12:4-5) – "members" not like stockholders in a corporation, but like the limbs of a body.

Human solidarity, like human dignity, is another idea modern man rightly praises but usually without knowing its true basis. *Why* are we one? Are all men one merely because of our material origin in Adam (or in apes)? Or is it rather because of our end, our destiny in Christ? The question is not just theoretical. Our culture is now seriously asking why we should respect all human life, including the unborn, the severely handicapped, the retarded, the insane, the sick, the dying, even the wicked and the criminal. And our culture does not know the answer. *Why*

should we treat these inconvenient and “unwanted” people as our brothers? The Church thunders the gentle answer: because they *are* our brothers, “in Christ.”

In the Incarnation, Christ assumed our human nature – all humanity, not just one Jewish, male, white body. Christ became *man*, not just *a* man. All men are therefore carriers of the image of the Son, as well as of the Father. Non-Christians cannot unmake the image of Christ in them by denying it, any more than atheists can unmake the image of the Father in them by denying it.

“The brotherhood of man” rests on “the Fatherhood of God” made incarnate in the Body of Christ. Why are we one? The Church not only *says* the answer: “the Body of Christ.” She *is* the answer.

5. *The human body*

Man was created in “the image of God” (Gn 1:26-27). What is “the image of God?” It is not only the soul. Although God’s nature is spirit, not body (Jn 4:24), yet “[t]he human body shares in the dignity of ‘the image of God’ . . . [I]t is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit ²³²” (C 364). That is why our bodies are holy, “temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 3:16-17; 6:19).

“For this reason man may not despise his bodily life. Rather, he is obliged to regard his body as good and to hold it in honor, since God has created it and will raise it up on the last day²³³” (C 364).

We are neither animals nor angels. Our bodies are neither the whole of our nature, as with the animals, nor out-

side our nature, as with the angels. They are not external to us, not costumes for spirits to hide in, like Halloween masks, or instruments for minds to manipulate, like computers. We are essentially body as well as spirit.

Why did God design us this way?

God designed us to be the priests of the whole of creation. “God created everything for man,²²² but man in turn was created to serve and love God and offer all creation back to him” (C 358).

How then do we fulfill our destiny as the priests of the whole creation?

When we offer ourselves to God, we offer up the whole universe in our body, for our body is a “microcosm,” a little cosmos, the universe in miniature. We are made of star-stuff and mineral stuff, and plant life, and animal sensations, as well as mind and will and heart. “Through his very bodily condition he sums up in himself the elements of the material world. Through him they are thus brought to their highest perfection and can raise their voice in praise freely given to the Creator. . . .²³³” (C 364). In us, the floods clap their hands and the hills sing for joy (Ps 98:8).

So nature becomes humanized in us. And we become divinized in Christ. We are the bridge from matter to spirit, and Christ is the bridge from man to God. As Scripture says, “all things are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s” (1 Cor 3:22-23).

6. The unity of soul and body

Man is not merely a body (that is materialism). Nor is he merely a soul (that is spiritualism). Nor is he two beings,

like a ghost in a machine (that is dualism). He is one being in two dimensions, bodily and spiritual. “The unity of soul and body is so profound that one has to consider the soul to be the ‘form’ of the body [‘form’ here meaning not ‘external shape’ but ‘intrinsic meaning’]:²³⁴ 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” (C 365).

The human soul is not imprisoned in the body, as Plato taught, but *expressed* in it, as the meaning of a play is expressed in its words. And the body is not enslaved by the soul but fulfilled by it, as a beautiful piece of marble is fulfilled and brought to perfection in a great work of sculpture.

7. *The human soul*

The human soul is not a pure spirit, like an angel. It is the “form” of the body; it is meant to inform a body. The body is not a house and the soul is not a ghost. We are not haunted! The soul is not something strange, occult, or alien. Just the opposite. It is who we are; it is our personality. God gave it to us at conception (that magical moment that was also the beginning of our body), and we shape it through all of life’s choices.

The Church’s most important teachings about the soul are “[1] that every spiritual soul is created immediately by God – it is not ‘produced’ by the parents – [2] and also that it is immortal: it does not perish when it separates

from the body at death, and [3] it will be reunited with the body at the final Resurrection²³⁵” (C 366).

On each of these three points there is good reason for our faith:

- 1) The soul must be created rather than evolved, because matter cannot make spirit any more than space can make time or color can make sound. They are two different dimensions. “You can’t get blood from a stone,” and you can’t get self-consciousness and free will from atoms and molecules.
- 2) The soul must be immortal because it is not made of atoms spread out in space and capable of being cut into parts. It is not composed, so it cannot be decomposed.
- 3) The soul must be reunited with a new body because God made man as a soul-body unity, and God makes no mistakes. Therefore the resurrection of the body is needed to complete and perfect our human nature in Heaven. (Between death and resurrection, we are incomplete.) We do not become angels any more than we become ants.

*8. Human sexuality**

God “invented” sex. That is why it is not “bad,” or “dirty.” Nor is it merely neutral, to be used as we please. It is good, and holy.

* (A word about words. Throughout centuries of English usage, “sex” meant not merely something we do (copulation) but something we are (male and female). And “gender” meant something grammatical, not biological: words had

No aspect of the Church's teaching is more misunderstood and rejected today than her unchanging and unchangeable principles of sexual morality. For these cannot be understood except in the context of her vision of man.

Man has not evolved by accident or blind chance. Man has been loved into existence by God. Man is *willed* by God, deliberately designed as male and female. That is the first reason why sex is holy.

The second reason is that God has designed and willed not only its existence but also its purpose. It is holy not only because of its origin but also because of its end. That purpose is to be the means of pro-creating the greatest things in the universe: new persons, with immortal souls. "By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents cooperate in a unique way in the Creator's work ²⁴⁷" (C 372).

Sexual intercourse is like the Consecration at the Mass. It is a human work which God uses as the material means to do the most divine work done on earth. In the Mass, man offers bread and wine, the work of nature and human hands, for God to transform into the body and blood of Christ. In sex, man offers his work – the procreation of a new body – for God to do his work: the creation of a new soul. God grants priests the incredible dignity of

gender (masculine and feminine nouns). Today, "gender" means what "sex" used to mean, and "sex" means simply copulation, or even any erotic stimulation ("having sex"). In other words, we have taken the word "sex" away from our personal *being* and reduced it to our biological *doing*, and taken the word "gender" away from grammar and exalted it to refer to human being.)

being his instruments in working one of his two greatest gifts. God grants spouses the incredible dignity of being his instruments in working the other one.

Something that is so very good “ontologically,” that is, in its being, essence, or nature, needs to be respected and rightly used. Misuse of something ontologically good is morally bad. The better and more important it is ontologically, the more seriously harmful its moral abuse is. We have rules for careful use of precious works of art, not for paper clips.

The principles of sexual morality are essentially unchanging because the meaning of sex is essentially unchanging. They stem from human nature itself which God designed, not from the changing mores of society, which man designs. God’s law is very clear: no adulterated sex, i.e. sex outside of marriage. As Holy Mass is the place for Transubstantiation, holy marriage is the place for sex.

9. Complementarity of men and women

The Biblical and Catholic vision of sexuality rejects both chauvinism, which sees one sex (either one) as superior, and unisexism, which sees the two sexes as different only by social convention, not by nature. God invented sex, and God created men and women *different in nature but equal in value*. Chauvinism and unisexism share the common false assumption that all differences must be differences in value.

Male and female were designed by God to complement, complete, and perfect each other, to love each other, and to find joy in each other, both biologically and spiritu-

ally. “Man and woman were made ‘for each other’ – not that God left them half-made and incomplete . . . [but that] he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be ‘helpmate’ to the other, for they are equal as persons . . . and complementary as masculine and feminine” (C 372).

The first and foundational community was a man and a woman, Adam and Eve. The first foundation of all human community, no matter how wide, even worldwide, is the family. And the family, no matter how extended, is based on this first foundation: one man and one woman becoming “one flesh” (Mt 19:3-6).

10. Man and Nature

On the one hand, man is part of Nature. He is the culmination of creation, but he is a creature, not the Creator. Nor is he an angel, confronting Nature from outside. Nature is not his machine but his “garden,” to be loved, revered, and cared for (Gn 2:15).

On the other hand, man is superior to Nature by his reason and free will; and God entrusted him with the “dominion” (lordship or mastery) of Nature (Gn 1:28-29). Man is the artist. Nature is his material and his studio. An artist “masters” his material by knowing, loving, and respecting it.

To master his material, an artist must first master himself. “The ‘mastery’ over the world that God offered man from the beginning was realized above all within man himself: *mastery of self*. The first man was . . . free from the triple concupiscence²⁵⁴ [disordered desire] that subjugates

him [like an addict] to the pleasures of the senses [lust], covetousness for earthly goods [greed], and self-assertion [pride], contrary to the dictates of reason” (C 377).

Self-mastery comes through the three virtues of poverty, chastity, and obedience. (These three are formally taken as lifelong vows by Catholic men and women who belong to institutes and societies of consecrated life.) They are the three weapons that counter the three key vices of greed, lust, and pride, which come from the three sources of temptation, “the world, the flesh, and the devil.” Competitive pride was the invention of the devil, who taught us to want to be “like gods” (Gn 3:5).

11. The Fall of man

How did man succumb to temptation? Was the “Fall” a historical event?

“The account of the fall in *Genesis* 3 uses figurative language, but affirms a primeval event, a deed that took place *at the beginning of the history of man*²⁶⁴” (C 390). The Church does not require us to interpret the Creation and Fall stories in *Genesis literally*, but she does insist that they must be interpreted historically, as something that really happened.

For if the Creation was not a real historical event (however symbolically that event may have been expressed in *Genesis*), but a mere “myth” in the popular sense, like Santa Claus, then how did the universe get here?

And if the Fall was not a real historical event (also narrated in symbolical language), but only a “myth,” then how

did sin get here? Sin is a historical fact, as real as the universe. Its cause must also be a historical fact.

12. The origin of evil

There are only two alternatives to the Fall, two other possible answers to the question of the origin of evil. If evil is not our fault, it must be the fault of either what is greater than us or of what is less than us: either God or Nature. If a statue has defects, we must blame either its sculptor or its material – unless the statue has free will and altered the sculptor’s design.

God is all-good, so he cannot be the origin of evil. And he is all-powerful and created the universe out of nothing, so matter is not the origin of evil; it is subject to his will, and is good. The only remaining culprit is the one we see in the mirror.

In confronting the mystery of evil, we must at least be honest enough to begin by admitting the reality of our data: human evil, moral wickedness, sin. “Sin is present in human history; any attempt to ignore it or to give this dark reality other names would be futile” (C 386). G. K. Chesterton said sin was the only Christian dogma you could prove simply by reading the daily newspaper.

The only adequate explanation of “horizontal” evil, the evil we do to each other (like Cain’s murder of Abel), is the prior story of “vertical” evil: the Fall, man declaring independence from God, the source of all good. “To try to understand what sin is, one must first recognize *the profound relation of man to God*, for only in this relationship is the evil of sin unmasked in its true identity . . .” (C 386).

13. The need for divine revelation to understand man

This is why secular explanations of evil are not sufficient. “Without the knowledge revelation gives of God, we cannot recognize sin clearly and are tempted to explain it as merely a developmental flaw, a psychological weakness, a mistake, or the necessary consequence of an inadequate social structure....” (C 387) Without God’s revelation, without the knowledge that human nature in its present state is fallen from the true norm, and thus not “normal” but “abnormal,” all our judgments of man are upside down. We then see sin as “normal” and “human,” and see sanctity as “abnormal” and “superhuman,” somewhat as drunks might see sober people as abnormal. This is precisely the fundamental error about man that is assumed by our secular society. “Ignorance of the fact that man has a wounded nature inclined to evil gives rise to serious errors in the areas of education, politics, social action,²⁹⁹ and morals” (C 407).

Man is like a caged dog in a railroad station who has chewed off his tag, so that he does not know his true name or the name of his master. He does not know where he has come from or where he is supposed to be going. Divine revelation gives us back our name tag. It is crucial information. Our master is our Creator, our name is “beloved child of God,” and our destiny is Heaven. It is crucial to keep this tag, to cherish it, to read and remember it, and to live by it.

14. Sin

The Fall was a fall into sin. What is sin?

“... [S]in is, so to speak, the ‘reverse side’ of the Good News that Jesus is the Savior...” (C 389) The Good News presupposes the Bad News, as the prognosis of a cure presupposes the diagnosis of the disease.

The idea of sin is very unpopular in the modern Western world. But it is an essential part of the Christian Gospel, and “[t]he Church, which has the mind of Christ,²⁶³ knows very well that we cannot tamper with the revelation of ... sin without undermining the mystery of Christ” (C 389). For what does Christ the Savior save us from? “You shall call his name ‘Jesus’ [which means ‘Savior,’ or ‘God saves’] for he shall save his people from their sins” (Mt 1:21).

Sin does not mean that we are wholly evil, or more evil than good (how could that be measured?), or that our very *being* is evil, or that we are no longer infinitely valuable and infinitely loved by God. It means that we are seriously wounded, a defaced masterpiece. The greater the masterpiece, the more terrible its defacement is.

15. The consequences of the Fall

“Scripture [Genesis 3] portrays the tragic consequences of this first disobedience. Adam and Eve . . . [1] become afraid of the God of whom they have conceived a distorted image – that of a God jealous of his prerogatives²⁸¹” (C 399). [2] “The control of the soul’s spiritual faculties over the body is shattered; [3] the union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination.²⁸² [4] Harmony with creation is broken: visible creation has become alien and

hostile to man.²⁸³ . . . [5] Finally, the consequence explicitly foretold for this disobedience will come true . . . *death makes its entrance into human history*²⁸⁶” (C 400).

Once the harmony between our soul and God is broken, all harmonies dependent on that one are broken too: harmony with nature (thorns and thistles, the sweat of your brow, and pain in childbirth), harmony between body and soul (illness and death), harmony between man and woman (Adam blames Eve), and harmony between brothers (Cain murders Abel).

16. The three stages of history: bad news and good news

Human history, like all the stories we tell, has three stages. A situation must always be first set-up, then somehow upset, then somehow reset, whether successfully or not. The Bible’s story follows these three stages: Creation, Fall, and Redemption. First, the good God creates a good world and man; then man defaces God’s creation and himself; then God laboriously sets it right. The three stages are Paradise (Eden), Paradise Lost (the Fall), and Paradise Regained (the Redemption).

(The Rosary goes through these three stages too: first five joyful mysteries, then five sorrowful mysteries, then five glorious mysteries. “One for sorrow, two for joy.”)

Already in Genesis 3 we see the beginning of the third stage, Redemption, when God promises Christ’s eventual victory over all evil. Genesis 3:15 is the first prophecy of the Gospel, the *protoevangelium*.

17. *Why did God allow sin?*

But *why did God not prevent the first man from sinning?* St. Leo the Great responds, “Christ’s inexpressible grace gave us blessings better than those the demon’s envy had taken away.³⁰⁷” And St. Thomas Aquinas wrote, “There is nothing to prevent human nature’s being raised up to something greater, even after sin; God permits evil in order to draw forth some greater good. Thus St. Paul says, ‘Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more’; and the [Easter liturgy’s] Exultet sings, ‘O happy fault, . . . which gained for us so great a Redeemer!’³⁰⁸” (C 412).

18. *Is man good or evil?*

He is both.

Two extremes are perennially possible and popular: pessimism which denies the goodness of man, and optimism, which denies the evil. The Church rejects both errors.

Thus she rejected Pelagianism, the fifth century heresy that taught that man is so good that he can save himself without God’s grace. Pelagius underestimated Original Sin (see Part I, Section 8, paragraphs 5-6) and “reduced the influence of Adam’s fault to bad example” (C 406). But the Church also rejected the teaching of Lutherans and Calvinists in the sixteenth century that man is so bad (“total depravity”) that he cannot freely choose to cooperate with God’s grace.

Notes from the Catechism in Order of Their Appearance in Quotations Used in this Section

- 219 *GS* 12 § 3.
- 224 *GS* 22 § 1.
- 232 Cf. *1 Cor* 6:19-20; 15:44-45.
- 233 *GS* 14 § 1; cf. *Dan* 3:57-80.
- 222 Cf. *GS* 12 § 1; 24 § 3; 39 § 1.
- 233 *GS* 14 § 1; cf. *Dan* 3:57-80.
- 234 Cf. Council of Vienne (1312): DS 902.
- 235 Cf. Pius XII, *Humani Generis*: DS 3896; Paul VI, *CPG* § 8; Lateran Council V (1513): DS 1440.
- 247 Cf. *GS* 50 § 1.
- 254 Cf. *1 Jn* 2:16.
- 264 Cf. *GS* 13 § 1.
- 299 Cf. John Paul II, *CA* 25.
- 263 Cf. *1 Cor* 2:16.
- 281 Cf. *Gen* 3:5-10.
- 282 Cf. *Gen* 3:7-16.
- 283 Cf. *Gen* 3:17, 19.
- 286 Cf. *Rom* 5:12.
- 307 St. Leo the Great, *Sermo* 73, 4: PL 54, 396.
- 308 St. Thomas Aquinas, *STh* III, 1, 3, *ad* 3; cf. *Rom* 5:20.

