

Spiritual Anatomy of An Individual

by Tom Kennedy

From the head to the heart. Author and speaker Christopher West, and others, call it the longest fifteen or so inches anyone will ever know. It is the distance they say our faith and understanding has to travel for it to become fulfilled. Some say it comes naturally to them, some say it takes a little effort, some say they know it in their heart but not in their head (in other words, they find faith hard to explain), and some, like me, find the concept and practice very vague, and difficult to understand.

On *Our Daily Bread* website, Julie Ackerman says "Eventually I realized that the Word of God had to spread through my whole being. I needed to internalize Scripture, to hide it "in my heart" the way a musician does a piece of music. I had to live the Bible as well as I could quote it. As God's Word spreads from our heads to our hearts, sin loses its power over us." This and many other statements like it are great insights into what we have to do and why we have to do it, but it still doesn't explain what the process is and how it works.

After several years of studying Pope John Paul II's *Theology of The Body*, and reading explanations of it by authors such as Christopher West, Katrina Zeno, Brian Butler and Jason and Crystalina Evert, and facilitating presentations based on Fr. Robert Barron's great *Catholicism* series, I have started to glimpse a concept that makes sense to me, a concept that is simple, and, hopefully, one that might help a few of us understand the concept better.

When using the terms Nature, Person, Soul, Spirit, Body and Individual we must remember that although these are individual parts of existence, they are indivisible, and except for Body, they are invisible. Without any one of these attributes, no one would, or could, exist as an individual. So what is an individual?

Nature + Person + Body = Individual. Let's look at these terms one at a time.

Let me give you a simplified definition before the complicated explanation.

Our nature tells us what to do, but it is our person that decides the action, or perhaps, decides on a different action, which is not in keeping with our nature, and our body carries out that action. The word nature in this sense asks the question *what* am I, my ethics, morals standards etc, while the word person answers the question *who* am I, how do I live up to my ethics, morals standards etc, and that *what* and *who* make up me. If my Nature tells me that murder is wrong and I do not commit murder, I am a moral person in that respect. However if I do commit murder, I am immoral, and probably sinning. What am I? A person who respects life. Who am I? A murderer.

So there are two realities in us, one is *what* we are, and one is *who* we are. Our difficulty is understanding the distinction between the *what* and the *who*, even though the distinction exists.

Nature is defined in the Encyclopaedia Britannica as the " fundamental dispositions and traits of humans" and in theology, our nature tells, us what to do, but there the similarity ends. Our nature tells, us what to do, but, in effect, our nature may be divided into two parts - our Soul and our Spirit.

Our soul, created by God at conception, is created with an innate sense of right. According to *The Catechism of The Catholic Church* "soul" refers to the innermost aspect of man, that which is of greatest value in him, that by which he is most especially in God's image: "soul" signifies the *spiritual principle* in man, in other words, an innate sense of right. By our birth or spiritual nature, we know what is right, but our twisted, selfish way of thinking leads us to "wrong". God gave us knowledge of right, but also the freedom of choice.

Spirit (Life of The Holy Spirit). The use of the term spirit signifying the supernatural life of grace is the explanation of St. Paul's language about the spiritual and the carnal man and his enumeration of the three elements, spirit, soul, and body according to the Catholic Encyclopaedia. The word spirit itself comes from the Latin spiritus, spirare, "to breathe". When we receive grace, God inspires us with his Holy Spirit (he "breathes" his Holy Spirit into us). Our Spirit, in other words, is the Supernatural life of Grace in us. What happens if our bodies stop breathing? We die. What happens if God stops breathing His grace into us? We die spiritually.

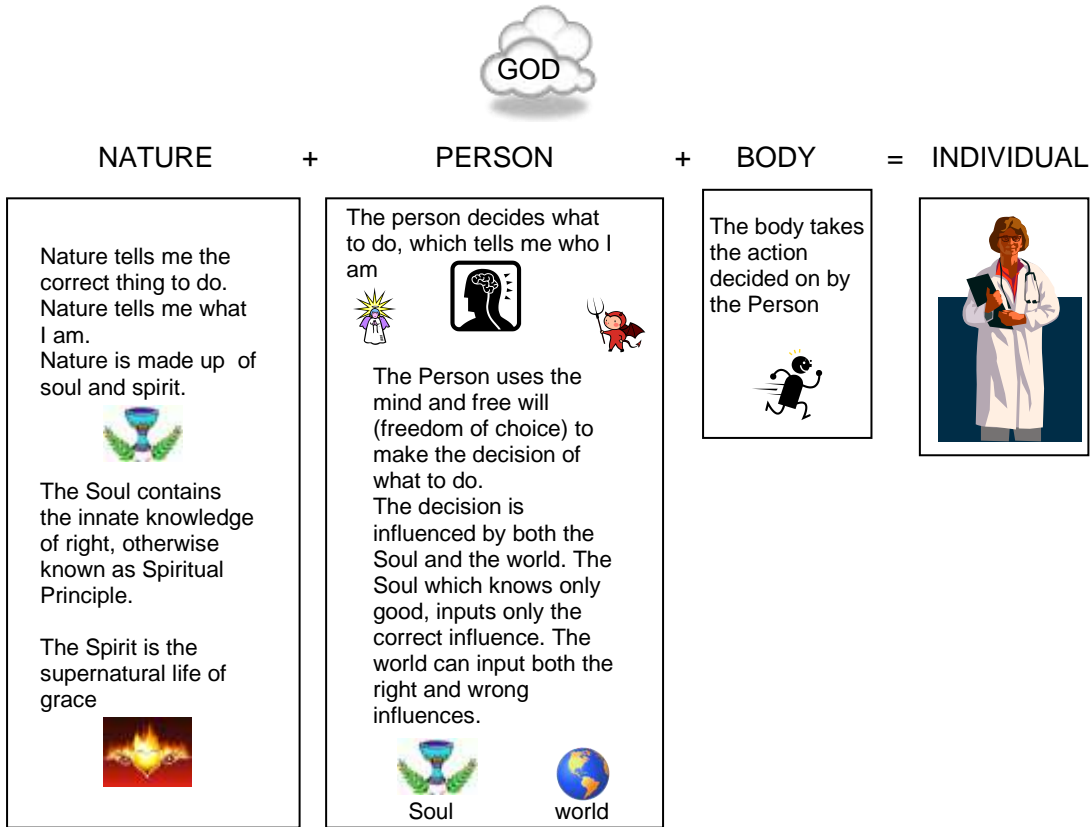
"Sometimes the soul is distinguished from the spirit: St. Paul for instance prays that God may sanctify his people "wholly", with "spirit and soul and body" kept sound and blameless at the Lord's coming. The Church teaches that this distinction does not introduce a duality into the soul. "Spirit" signifies that from creation man is ordered to a supernatural end and that his soul can gratuitously be raised beyond all it deserves to communion with God." *The Catechism of The Catholic Church* 367

Nature therefore tells us what to do and what we are. It consists of the Soul (innate goodness and spiritual principles) and the Spirit (Supernatural life of Grace).

Now we move on to the Person, which answers the question *who* am I. Do I live up to my "natural ethics or morals, or do I lie with my body and do the wrong thing? Here is where the cartoon angel on the right shoulder and the devil on the left shoulder come in. The angel on my right shoulder is my Nature telling me what is right, while the devil on my left shoulder is my twisted understanding telling me to do what is wrong. Listening to the angel brings grace or "inspires" me; listening to that little devil brings death. It is no coincidence that the devil is always on the left shoulder, as the Latin word for left is *sinistre*, from which we get the English word *sinister*.

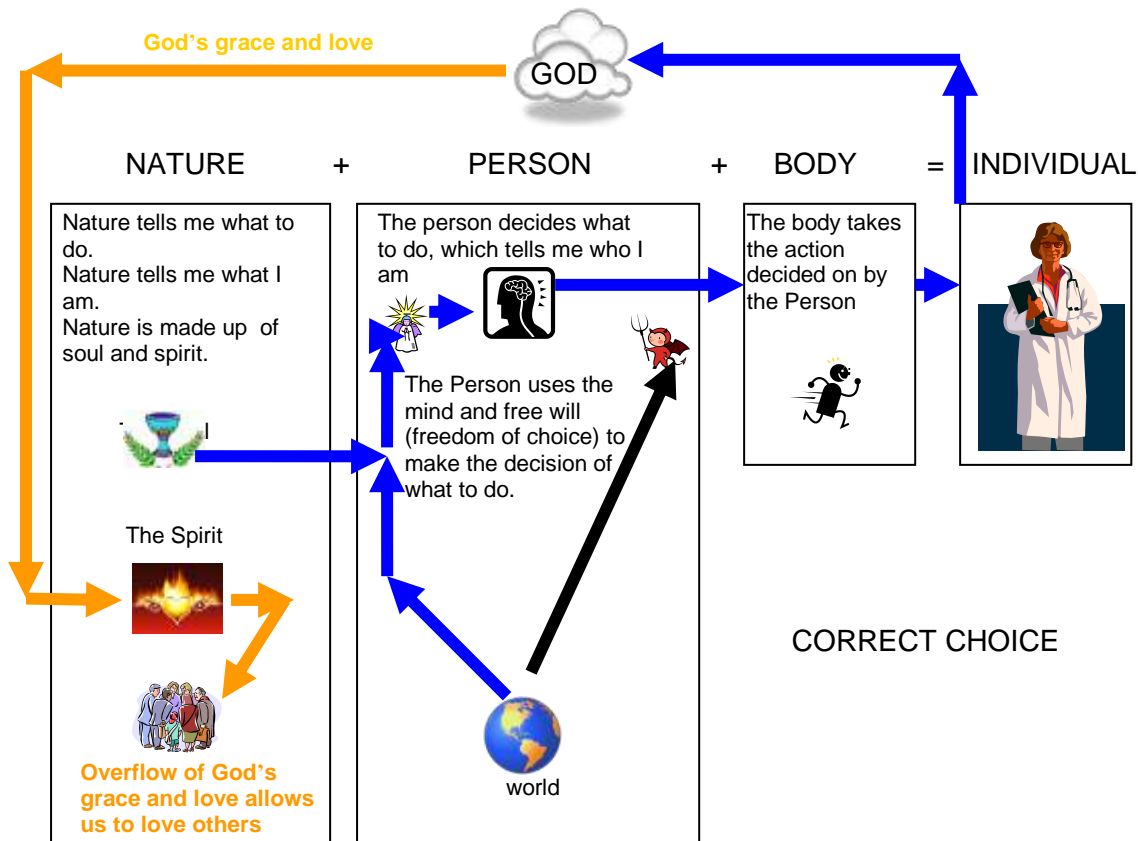
Our Nature and soul are in the Image of God, and Our Spirit is the Likeness of God

Let's expand the little equation Nature + Person + Body = Individual we had earlier, and it now looks like this:



Now that we have looked at the areas of our humanity that are involved in our decisions, how do they interact when we are tempted, we must look at how we act when we are tempted, how we make a decision, and how that affects our relationship with God.

Choosing the good.

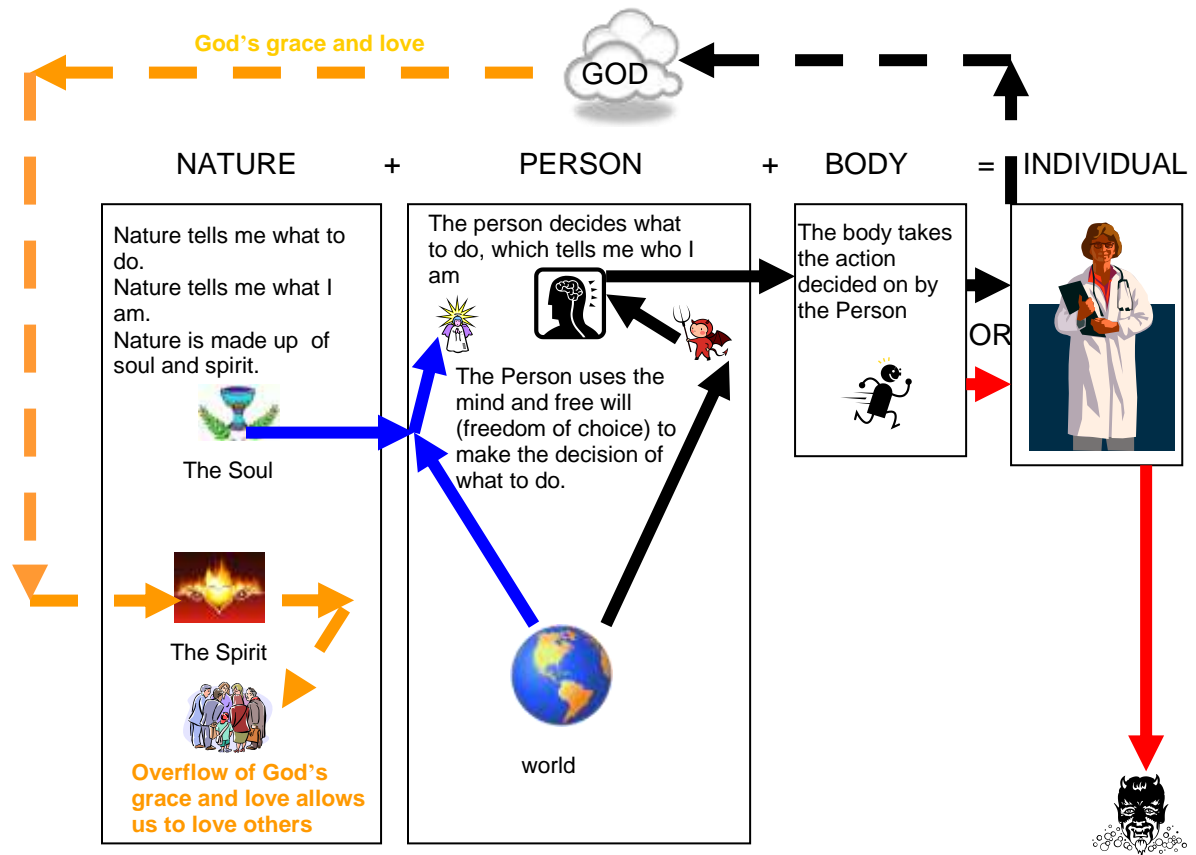


When we are tempted our Person (our mind) knows it has to make a decision. Since we have freedom of choice, our mind weighs all of the pros and cons for each possible action before making a decision. This can take anywhere from a millisecond to hours or weeks. During this process our souls always tell us what is good, and when tempted we hear the soul the angel on our right shoulder) telling us what the good to do, and we hear the "world" through the Church, good people etc telling us what is good. At the same time the fallen world due to concupiscence is telling us the wrong thing to do.

This time we opt to do good, and the flow of bad intent stops at the devil on our left shoulder (in other words we ignore and overcome the temptation). We live up to the innate knowledge of right (ethos), the Person has made the decision to be moral, our Body has acted in a moral manner, and as an Individual we show God and others that we live up to our ethos.

This act of goodness rises to God who then fills our spirit with his love and grace, strengthening our faith, and through the overflow of His love we open up and share his love back to Him and with others in His image

Choosing the bad.



This time we opt for the bad, and the flow of good intent from the soul stops at the angel on our right shoulder (in other words we ignore and give in to temptation). We do not live up to the innate knowledge of right (ethos), the Person has made the decision to be immoral, our Body has acted in a immoral manner, and as an Individual we show God and others that we do not live up to our ethos.

If the body commits a mortal sin (red lines), we are cut off from God's grace and love, and if unforgiven, it's a fast elevator to the basement. If this mortal sin is confessed and forgiven, God's grace and love will be fully restored. Mortal sin "If it is not redeemed by repentance and God's forgiveness, it causes exclusion from Christ's kingdom and the eternal death of hell." *Catechism of The Catholic Church 1861*

If the body commits a venial sin (black lines) we are intermittently cut off from God's grace and love (orange line), and this is fully restored when we confess our sins. Venial sin "impedes the soul's progress in the exercise of the virtues and the practice of the moral good; it merits temporal punishment. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin. However venial sin does not break the covenant with God. With God's grace it is humanly reparable. "Venial sin does not deprive the

sinner of sanctifying grace, friendship with God, charity, and consequently eternal happiness." *Catechism of The Catholic Church 1863*

Now might be a good time to re-look at soul and spirit in light of the previous explanations and diagrams. God gives us human life and animates us at birth with a soul. Our soul has a total knowledge of right, and equally important, our soul will actually leave our bodies when we die, to be reunited at the last day. When we are baptized, God sends his Spirit into us, that Spirit, which is His life of grace, is distinct from the soul, and when we sin, we lose all or some of that spirit or grace, to have it topped up if you will, or replaced when we confess and are forgiven.

So what does all this have to do with the 15 inches from the head to the heart? What did Jesus mean by "heart" when he said "for your hardness of heart"? His reference was a metaphor or an icon. If our hearts are not infused with blood, we die. If we are not infused (inspired) with Grace, we die spiritually. Our hearts are icons of our human love, and also used as icons of our spiritual love. This is why we use the word "heart" in the phrase head to heart. If we know the truth but don't live it, it is in our head not our heart.

Our Nature tells us what is right. Our Bodies, or at least our minds, learn from the Bible, from The Church, etc., what is right. Look at the chart to see what lies between Nature and Body. Person! This is the "heart" we have to move to. This is the "heart" we have to listen to and soften. When our nature and our body tell us what is right, and our person chooses to do that right, then we have moved our faith from our head to our heart. The true distance from the head to the heart is not fifteen inches, it is zero. In the spiritual sense, they are the same. Our mind, our ability to choose right or wrong, is really the "heart" of our spiritual salvation, or not.

Head to heart is not a one time deal when we learn something. It is an ongoing process every time we use our God given gift of choice. We must act on Nature, not on our sinful fallen state.