A Few Related Thoughts…

***The Elephant Man***

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? …Therefore, glorify God in your body.”

--St. Paul (1 Cor 6:19-20)

“[Merrick’s] suffering, like a cleansing fire, seems to have brought him nearer to that human condition in which all the nonessentials of life having fallen away, only the essential goodness of man remained.”

--Ashley Montagu

“You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother’s womb. I praise you, because I am wonderfully made; wonderful are your works! My very self you know.”

--Psalm 139

“Of all visible creatures only man … 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: Being in the image of God, the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but some*one*.”

--***Catechism of the Catholic Church***, #356-57

“How varied are your works, O Lord! You have made all things in wisdom: the earth is filled with your riches.”

--Psalm 104

“The human person … is a being at once corporeal [having a physical body] and spiritual. … Man, whole and entire, is therefore willed by God.

In Sacred Scripture the term ‘soul’ often refers to human life or the entire human person. But ‘soul’ also 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.

The human body shares in the dignity of ‘the image of God’: it is a human body precisely because it is animated by a spiritual soul, and it is the whole human person that is intended to become, in the body of Christ, a temple of the Spirit.”

--***Catechism of the Catholic Church***, #362-64

“As he passed by, [Jesus] saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ Jesus answered, ‘Neither he nor his parents sinned; it is so that the works of God might be made visible through him.’

--John 9:1-3

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

--United States Declaration of Independence

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

--United Nations General Assembly

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

“Man, though made of body and soul, is a unity. 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… 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 day…. There is a growing awareness of the exalted dignity proper to the human person, since he stands above all things, and his rights and duties are universal and inviolable. Therefore, there must be made available to all men everything necessary for leading a life truly human, such as food, clothing, and shelter; the right to choose a state of life freely; …to respect, …to protection of privacy and rightful freedom…”

--Vatican II, ***Gaudium et Spes***, 14, 26

“Those who are interested in the evolution of character might speculate as to the effect of this brutish life upon a sensitive and intelligent man. It would be reasonable to surmise that he would become … swollen with venom and filled with hatred for his fellow-men… Merrick, however, was no such being… His troubles had ennobled him. He showed himself to be a gentle, affectionate and lovable creature … free from any trace of cynicism or resentment and without an unkind word for anyone. I have never once heard him complain.

…

The Merrick whom I had found shivering behind a rag of a curtain in an empty shop was now conversant with duchesses and countesses… He was not the least bit spoiled; not the least bit puffed up; he never asked for anything; never presumed upon the kindness meted out to him, and was always humbly and profoundly grateful.

…

As a specimen of humanity, Merrick was ignoble and repulsive; but the spirit of Merrick, if it could be seen in the form of the living, would assume the figure of an upstanding and heroic man … with eyes that flashed undaunted courage.”

--Sir Frederick Treves

#### For further reading…

Gospel of John, Chapter 9; Psalms 139, 104;

Vatican II, ***Gaudium et Spes***, 24-26

Ashley Montagu, ***The Elephant Man: A Study in Human Dignity***. New York: Outerbridge & Dienstfrey, 1971.

Michael Howell & Peter Ford, ***The True History of the Elephant Man: The Definitive Account of the Tragic and Extraordinary Life of Joseph Carey Merrick***, 3rd ed. London: Allison & Busby, 2001.