

The Map of Life

Father James Chelich – January 2021

The Map of Life has been charted with thoughtful care by human beings for thousands of years. Observant and thoughtful men and women wrote about what they observed in themselves and in the reality of the world around them. They asked questions about what it means to be a human being and the purpose of human life. God, the Origin of All Existence, contributed a great deal to the Map of Life by revealing things we could not know on our own. What God reveals corresponds with and expands what human beings have observed for themselves.

Having a Map of Life is important. You can get pretty scratched, bruised and sometimes beat up if you go about life without one. It is easy to fall into holes, get bogged down in swamps, and come to hopeless dead ends. Catholic Faith leads you to see and understand the essential features of the Map of Life. The concept of a Map for Life is particularly useful to me, as a pastor and teacher. It affords me a way to convey to you that religion is not just a diverse collection of concepts and convictions, but a coherent whole. It enables me to emphasize that religion is about life, real life – your life. Like every map, religion is about a beginning and a destination, and about what we meet along the way.

FEATURES ON THE MAP OF LIFE

WHERE YOU BEGAN

*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you,
a prophet to the nations I appointed you. Jeremiah 1:5*

Your “beginning” as a human being was an act of love by God, the Origin of All Existence. Your faith teaches you that at the moment of your conception, you were thought of in the mind of God as the unique person you are, and were loved by God as the unique person you are. This is enormously important for you to know. It is the foundation of your self-confidence. You do not have to apologize for your existence to anyone, nor do you have to apologize for who you uniquely are to anyone. A lot of people feel they have to, and it erodes their self-confidence throughout the whole course of their life. They twist their lives into knots by comparing themselves to others, and nurse envy and jealousy as a result. Those who do not come to realize that they exist because they are wanted and loved, struggle to find a solid foundation for their life. They are *desperate* to find someone who will love them, but look in all the wrong places and try in all the wrong ways. They become sad and lost.

The Purpose of Your Existence

Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness...

In the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. Genesis 1:26-27

Your faith teaches that you were created and designed by God for a particular kind of love. On the Map, Jesus defines the meaning of “love”: *to die to yourself to give life to others*. When you love in this way, you grow into the “likeness” of God, in whose “image” you were created. Created in God’s *image*, you are given your lifetime to grow into God’s *likeness*. God created you so that God could love the world through you and with you. You were designed for communion with God. You expand your soul, one act of love at a time. You find joy in everything to which you give life. Only in this will you find the ultimate meaning and purpose of your life. Only in this will you find a joy and fulfillment that endures.

FAMILY

*The Lord sets a father in honor over his children,
a mother’s authority he confirms over her sons. Sirach 3:2*

Learning is not a task and cannot be reduced to a task. Learning is a person’s “taking in” of the Truth of Things in the world. It requires a “field” or environment that *unconditionally* supports you as a person: that allows mistakes to be made and corrected, that models virtue, and that is transparent and truthful.

The family is the “Primary School” of your humanity. Here Wonder and Awe before the reality of things in the world is awakened. What it means to be human is explored in an intimate relationship with those who, with God, gave you life. Absence of a family leaves a person lost and disoriented before the world. They carry this loss within them. Your Faith speaks to the importance and the integrity of the family, and the duties of a father and a mother.

You Have an Insatiable Desire to Know

You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free. John 8:32

Human beings are designed to know. We are made to discover and learn the truth about things in the world around us, and to see the good in them. It is important to love learning. Expanding your mind with knowledge enables you to unfold your potential to do good. Wonder and Awe is the right attitude with which to encounter and explore the world and unlock its potential. Knowledge of the Truth of Things is the first step to coming into a living relationship with the things in the world around you.

The CLOUD OF ILLUSION

You must lay aside your former way of life and the old self which deteriorates through illusion and desire. Ephesians 4:22

The Map warns you that you can construct imaginative worlds in your mind or escape into virtual realities, which can leave you lost and alienated from the reality and life of the world around you. Imaginative worlds are not real but you can come to think so. Faith speaks to what is real.

THE WORLD

What is man that you are mindful of him, or the sons and daughters of man that you care for him?... You have given him rule over the works of your hands. Psalm 8:5-7

The Map explains that there are **Five Levels of Being** in the world for you to encounter and discover:

Inanimate Matter - air, water, fire (energy), minerals, planets, suns and moons.

Plants - Plants have a mysterious property that Inanimate Matter does not have: *the power of Life*.

Animals - Animals have a mysterious property that Inanimate Matter and Plants do not have: *The Power of Consciousness*. They can think, learn and move about in search of what they need.

Human Beings – Human Beings have a mysterious property that Inanimate Matter, Plants and Animals do not have: *The Power of Self-awareness*. There is a “substance” to this self awareness. It is called an *Immortal Soul*. At death it leaves the body and enters into eternal life. Human beings can think about themselves and decide for themselves what they want and how to act. They can know the difference between what is good and what is evil.

The way of studying and learning about Plants (with life) is different in important ways from the way of studying and learning about Inanimate Matter. The way of studying and learning about Animals (with consciousness) is different in important ways from the way of studying and learning about Inanimate Matter and Plants. The way of studying and learning about Human Beings (with self-awareness) is different in important ways from the way of studying and learning about Inanimate Matter, Plants and Animals. The methods of analysis, and the conclusions you draw about one Level of Being cannot be carried over wholesale to be applied to another Level of Being. You don’t treat Plants the way you treat Inanimate Matter. You don’t treat Animals the way you treat Inanimate Matter or Plants. You don’t treat Human Beings the way you treat Inanimate Matter, Plants or Animals. It is wrong to do so.

God, the Origin of All Being, and Angels. Human Beings have always suspected that there was a Level of Being above them. These beings have a mysterious property that Inanimate Matter, Plants, Animals and Human Beings don’t have: *This Power is Divine Grace (The Life of God)*. God holds the world together and unfolds its potential for the good. Angels have their role in this activity. Human Beings have always striven to know God, to experience God’s power and to enter into relationship with God. God, the Origin of All Existence, took the initiative to reveal to human beings much about this Level of Being and to invite Human Beings to know, love and enter into a living relationship with God. What God reveals is found in the Bible.

THE FUNDAMENTAL MORAL PRINCIPLE

If you obey the commandments of the LORD, your God, which I am giving you today, loving the LORD, your God, and walking in his ways...you will live and grow numerous... If, however, your heart turns away and you do not obey, but are led astray and bow down to other gods and serve them, I tell you today that you will certainly perish.... Deuteronomy 30:16-18

God created the world as a living whole. **God commands us to study, learn and honor the integrity of all people and things**, and warns us never to violate it. **God also commands us to study, learn and respect the right and life-giving relationship between all people and things**, and warns us never to violate it. This is the fundamental moral principle of existence in the world. It is the essence of the Commandments of the Christian Faith and the foundation of true scientific activity. God tells us that we must obey these principles if we, and our world, are to live and prosper. It is important to understand and embrace these principles. There is no barrier between the truth we learn in religion and the truth we learn in science. Search for and be curious to know the full truth of all things and to walk in faith. Become a steward of creation and its life. This will bring you into harmony with the things in the world around you.

WORK

Prosper the work of our hands, O Lord. Prosper the work of our hands! Psalm 90:17

You have a body with hands. There is an important reason for this. **Work and creativity (Art)** are essential to actualizing your potential as a human being. Faith teaches that we are created in the “image” of God, the Creator. We are made to be *creative actors* in our world. Through Jesus and with Jesus, you labor and create, and give life to the world, unfolding its potential and beauty for the good of all.

YOUR PASSIONS

Turn from your youthful desires and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. Avoid foolish and ignorant debates, for you know that they breed quarrels... 2 Timothy 2:22-25

The most important task a human being has is to shape their character by harnessing the drives and passions of their body, mind and spirit in a way that will allow them to do good, and love the people and things they are given to love. In this way you shape your character (your *Immortal Soul*). On the path of life you must make a choice: to become a world builder, a world consumer, or a world destroyer.

THE FOREST OF THE VIRTUES AND THE SWAMP OF THE VICES

The works of the flesh are obvious: immorality, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, hatreds, rivalry, jealousy, outbursts of fury, acts of selfishness, dissensions, factions, envy, drinking bouts, orgies, and the like....In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Galatians 5:19-26

The virtues that belong to a complete human being are first, Humility, and then Prudence, Justice, Fortitude and Temperance. Other virtues – like compassion, courage, honesty, and forgiveness – flow from these. It is important to know them and to practice them. This is how you equip yourself to give life to the world and prepare yourself for your life in the world to come. If you follow the path through **The Forest of Virtues**, you will harness the energy of your passions, and will create and give life to the world. If you follow the path into **The Swamp of Vices**, your passions go uncontrolled. You abuse, destroy and ruin the world, sinking yourself deeper and deeper into emptiness and loss.

THE WAY: Jesus

I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. John 14:6

God appears on the Map of Life “in person” – in the Person of Jesus. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life (John 14:6). Having a Map for Life is important. Having a companion to walk the path through life with you is even more important, particularly someone who has walked the path before you. Jesus is God come down to earth to meet you and walk with you on your journey through life. You are never alone, no matter what you have to do or face. If you ask, Jesus will lead you to see and know the truth of all things. Jesus gave his life to release you from the power of Sin (and the vices). He will teach you to love as God loves – the way God made you to love: *dying to yourself to give life to others*. If you walk with Jesus, he

will lead you through **The Forest of Virtues** and give you the strength to bring your passions into right order. You will find in Jesus a model and a mentor in acquiring virtue. If you wander into **The Swamp of the Vices**, Jesus can lead you out, but you must decide you want to leave, ask for his help, and follow him. Jesus never loses you, but you can let go of him. There is no greater priority than to form a strong personal relationship with Jesus.

The Catholic Faith teaches the fullness of the truth about Jesus. This wisdom comes from two thousand years of reflecting on the Word of God and the life of Jesus, and how it “speaks” to the reality of human life in the world. Jesus joins us to himself and to each other in his Church, which is the Body of Christ in the world. It proclaims his presence and Jesus continues his work through it for all time.

ADVERSITY

I am the gate. Whoever enters through me will be safe. John 10:9

Human life will bring most people to face adversity. Illness, loss, disaster, failure, or oppression can knock the floor out from under you. Faith in Jesus is critical. We turn to Jesus and ask to have the adversity removed. If that is not to be, we ask him to open a door in the midst of adversity and lead us through it. He has vowed to do so. When we face adversity with Jesus we emerge from it expanded in soul, greater in stature as a human being. Without faith it is easy to fall into the Pit of Despair.

TRANSFORMATION FROM GLORY TO GLORY

All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into his image, from glory to glory, by the Lord who is the Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18

A truly human life is lived *from the inside, out*. This is in stark contrast to the way in which most people live their lives: *from the outside, in*. They constantly attend to what everyone around them is thinking, saying and doing. Either from wanting to “fit in” or from fear of “being different,” they end up doing the same. Truly human being pauses often. He silences his ears to the noise of the world around him and turns inward. He asks himself, “What do I know to be true? What is right to do and to say?” A Christian goes further. She pauses, *and prays*. She asks: “God, let me see what is really taking place, show me the good I am to do, and give me the strength to do it.” In communion with God, a Christian is built *from the inside, out*. One act of self-sacrificing love after another, one virtue after another embraced, one vice after another released, one insight of wisdom after another sought and gained, one work of beauty after another created, in this way your very being (your *Immortal Soul*) is transformed by the Holy Spirit into the *likeness* of God, in Whose *image* you were created. You become an integrated human person (body, soul and interior spirit): a person confident in the uniqueness of who you are and, at the same time, conscious of Divine Life flowing through you into the world around you. You become a creative actor unfolding the beauty and potential of the world for the good of all. You are “at home” in the world and “capable” of Heaven. None of this can be done without Divine assistance, a supernatural power inspiring and assisting you. Jesus said there are two paths. (Matthew 7:13) One leads to greatness of soul and eternal life. The other finds you withering away in illusion and desire, or burning up in anger and resentment. One makes you fit for Heaven, the other does not.

YOUR DESTINATION

Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, and what has not entered the human heart, what God has prepared for those who love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9

Having become successful at creating and unfolding the good and the beautiful around you, you arrive at the Good and the Beautiful: God, the Origin of all Goodness and Beauty. Becoming successful at creating, fostering and sustaining life on earth, you enter into Eternal Life with God and continue to do just that. Heaven is to share fully in God’s life, God’s work and God’s joy – forever. The kind of person you allow yourself to become in this life will determine the kind of person you will be in the life to come. This is what you are given your lifetime in the world to do. Those who go to Heaven are those who are fit to make Heaven.