



# Institute For Theological Encounter With Science and Technology

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Fall 2016 Bulletin

## The Achievement of Father Spitzer

Teachers of religion and teachers of science sometimes have little contact with each other, hoping to avoid “turf battles.” But in the minds of students, both religion and science ought to blend together in a compatible way. When that doesn’t happen, students reject one or the other, and surveys show that it’s usually religion that gets discarded.

In ITEST’s work to counteract this, we draw heavily from DVDs created by Robert Spitzer S.J. that are aimed at high-school students. You may be familiar with “Father Spitzer’s Universe,” a weekly TV show on EWTN where he answers questions from viewers on topics related to science and religion.

But Father Spitzer has accomplished much more than we may see on any given show. His insight has sailed over the heads of most religious believers – including Catholic professors and educators.

Nobody other than Fr. Spitzer has picked up on something stunning, something that all the philosophers across the Enlightenment failed to grasp. To understand it, we need to turn to a little-known scientific paper written in 2003 by astrophysicists Borde, Guth and Vilenkin Its title--“Inflationary spacetimes are not past-complete”--is not very user friendly, but it touches on something extremely important. In a nutshell, the paper proved that the universe had to have a finite past time-horizon, meaning: a beginning in time. It’s a very solid proof, which applies to any universe you can possibly imagine.

So— and this is what Fr. Spitzer has pinpointed in highlighting that paper -- past philosophers who assumed time is eternal were mistaken. Hume, Nietzsche, Hobbes, etc., all suffered from the same fundamental mistake. They took Newton’s Classical Mechanics as absolute truth, and hence believed that time just ran on endlessly forever in both past and future directions. Any God would have to live within that time domain. That, in turn, enabled them to either dismiss God entirely or relegate God to a disinterested role of one who wound up the clock, never looked again, and was therefore irrelevant to mankind.

That cornerstone of Enlightenment-era thinking has persisted up to the present day, unchallenged by countless professors who don’t have a grasp of science. But Fr. Spitzer does! And he also grasped the implications of this contemporary physics for philosophy and theology.

This crucial scientific fact completely undermines the atheists at a very fundamental level. Together with the scientific principle of ever-increasing entropy (disorder), and the incredibly precise anthropic coincidences that make intelligent life possible, Fr. Spitzer has constructed a very strong case that the most reasonable and responsible conclusion to draw is that our universe was created by God, whose existence transcends the universe, space and time.

We at ITEST build on solid work like his — and other great work being done in the field of faith and science — to help teachers become more comfortable conveying this knowledge to their students. Bringing faith and science together is exactly what ITEST has been doing since 1968.

Director, ITEST

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## Announcements

### Fund Raising Results

The ITEST Board of Directors wants to thank all who donated to the bi-yearly fund raising effort this summer. Although only 28 members donated, we raised \$4510. Of course we would be happier if we had raised three times that amount, but we are grateful for the contributions which will become part of our operating expenses. If you forgot to donate but really intended to, please feel free to send us whatever you can, even if it pinches the pocket a bit.

### October Conference Report

Go to Tom Sheahan's Executive Summary on page 3 for a report on the highlights of the ITEST conference on "The Role of Changing Technology in End of Life Issues." Dues-paid members for 2016 will receive, as part of their membership, the audio disks of the conference. Look for them in the mail.

### Find us on YouTube

In the Summer issue of the Bulletin we gave you a "head's up" about our \*STAR Catholic high school teachers who have successfully used the Magis Center materials, "The Reason Series" and "From Nothing to Cosmos" with their students during the year. In the short videos created by the teachers, they discuss how they learned about the series and how they used the series in their classrooms. In one video the students note that after viewing the videos in class they found themselves more capable of talking about their faith not only with those who believe as they do, but with those who challenge their beliefs. Thanks again to ITEST Board member, Professor Ralph Olliges, of Webster University and technical director, Adjunct Professor, Scott Wagner for the hours spent in editing and packaging the videos. (\*STAR—Science, Technology and Religion.)

Here are the links for the videos funded in part by grants from the Dr. Scholl Foundation and the Annual Catholic Appeal of St. Louis. Click on the links or copy them into your browser.

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2yzz4\\_CxTI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q2yzz4_CxTI)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8oSe8XLjLw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o8oSe8XLjLw)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=jat79ADTPlc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jat79ADTPlc)  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZ\\_jzwYvx5k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZ_jzwYvx5k)

### EWTN Network Highlights

Just a reminder to turn to "Father Spitzer's Universe" on EWTN scheduled for Wednesdays live at 2:00 pm Eastern time with encores Thursday, 10:00 pm and Sunday, 3:00 am. EWTN notes "Father Spitzer answers viewers' questions on a wide range of subjects, such as reason, faith, suffering, virtue and the existence of God." Jesuit Robert Spitzer is a popular speaker, writer and video producer on issues relating to faith and science and has worked collaboratively on webinars and workshops with ITEST and the Catholic high school science and religion teachers in the St. Louis Archdiocese. Here is the link to the July 27, 2016 show: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nzbs5ZpXzIg>

On this particular show, the main theme dealt with the widespread perception that all scientists are atheists, one which Fr. Spitzer deftly dismantles.

### Congratulations to ITEST Board Member

We congratulate Sebastian Mahfood, Op PhD, on" . . . his promotion to Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies. Dr. Mahfood has worked at Holy Apostles (HACS) since spring, 2011. In addition to teaching, he has served Holy Apostles as the Director of Distance Learning, the Vice-President of Administrative Affairs, and now as both the Vice-President of External Affairs and Governmental Compliance, and the Director of Assessment. In the past five years he has prepared HACS and NEASC\* and ATS\*\* Accreditation Visitations. Additionally, he has earned an MA in Theology and an MA in Philosophy from Holy Apostles." Cynthia Toolin-Wilson, PhD, Academic Dean of Online Learning at HACS.

\*New England Association of Schools and Colleges

\*\*Association of Theological Schools

### State Laws on Physician-Assisted Suicide on The Increase

Click On the link below to access a timely article in the National Catholic Register – "Assisted-Suicide Nearly Law in Nation's Capital with D.C. Council Vote."

If you do not receive the digital copy of the Bulletin simply go to [www.ncregister.com](http://www.ncregister.com) and search for November 3, 2016.

[http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/assisted-suicide-nearly-law-in-nations-capital-with-d.c.-council-vote?utm\\_source=feedburner&utm\\_medium=feed&utm\\_campaign=Feed%3A+NCRRegisterDailyBlog+National+Catholic+Register&utm\\_content=FeedBumer#When%3A2016-11-3+14%3A29%3A01](http://www.ncregister.com/daily-news/assisted-suicide-nearly-law-in-nations-capital-with-d.c.-council-vote?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+NCRRegisterDailyBlog+National+Catholic+Register&utm_content=FeedBumer#When%3A2016-11-3+14%3A29%3A01)



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## ITEST Conference October 22, 2016

### Executive Synopsis

*The Role of Changing Technology in End of Life Issues:  
A Christian Response*

by Dr. Thomas P. Sheahan

The 2016 ITEST conference was held at the Medical School of St. Louis University, with featured speakers Kimbell Kornu, MD and Fr. Charles Bouchard, OP. They addressed both the technology and the ethics issues of contemporary importance.

The idea for this conference began shortly after the ITEST conference of 2008, where Dr. Edmund Pellegrino presented a comparison of Catholic medical ethics vs. secular medical ethics. With the passage of several years, the rapidly-advancing role of technology became evident.

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*Today, the process of dying is considerably different from what it was a decade or two ago.*

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Today, the process of dying is considerably different from what it was a decade or two ago.

There are many state legislatures giving consideration to bills permitting assisted suicide, but all of these are behind the curve, based on 20th century images of dying. Modern methods of treatment can alleviate pain without degrading and objectifying the dying patient. That is essential to the Christian response.

Our first speaker was Kimbell Kornu, MD, who is instructor and physician at the Albert Gnaegi Center for Health Care Ethics at St. Louis University. In addition to practicing medicine, Dr. Kornu is nearing completion of his doctoral thesis for a PhD in Theology – so his understanding of medical ethics issues is firmly rooted in both poles of the field. His topic for this conference was “The Good Death: Liturgy of the Church or Liturgy of Medical Technology?”

Dr. Kornu first addressed the topic of a “good death” and how it evolved over the centuries. In 1968, the definition of death was revised (by a Harvard ad hoc committee) to mean brain-death; that decision was driven by the desire to promote organ-transplants. The first hospice was established in 1957 in England by Dame Cicely Saunders, and the idea spread rapidly. A hospice has a broader view of a “good death.”

An important task today is to improve end-of-life deci-

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sion making. The 3 major focus points are: control, autonomy and independence. Increasingly, patients and their caregivers work out advance directives, so that the dying patients’ wishes are known and can be followed. Doctors confer with patients and families, attending to differences between futile care and effective care.

Dr. Kornu contrasted the two different “liturgies” associated with dying. He mentioned the book by Dr. Jeff Bishop, Director of the Albert Gnaegi Center at St. Louis University, on death and dying, titled *The Anticipatory Corpse: The Medicine, Power and the Care of the Dying*, Notre Dame Studies in Medical Ethics, University of Notre Dame Press, 2011.

Space constraints here limit us to mere mention of a lively Q&A session that followed Dr. Kornu’s talk. One important point that emerged is that “...there is some stigma attached to palliative care, because it seems to signal “giving up.”

Next was Fr. Charles Bouchard, OP, who is senior director of theology and ethics for the national Catholic Health Association. A decade ago he was president of the Aquinas Institute of Theology, and later was elected as Provincial of his Dominican Community. He is highly regarded as an expert in Catholic medical ethics. His topic was “Science and the Soul: Can we recover the spiritual dimension of death?”

The foremost problem today that Fr. Bouchard sees is that most people (including physicians and families) simply

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*...most people (including physicians and families) simply don't have the tools to deal with the issue of dying.*

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don't have the tools to deal with the issue of dying. There is a tremendous need to restore the spiritual dimension of

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the process. He recalled the “prayers for a happy death,” which is a lost tradition. Over the last century, people have come to live much longer; most of us will know of our terminal condition.

Fr. Bouchard addressed the topic of moral agency. “Pa-

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*“Patient autonomy” is now a key concept, and the physician is seen as the agent of the patient.*

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tient autonomy” is now a key concept, and the physician is seen as the agent of the patient. But still, collaborative decision-making has not fully succeeded. One side-effect that we don’t want is seeing the patient as an object of medical inquiry. We mustn’t lose sight of the humanity of the patient, nor of the spiritual dimension of dying.

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*We mustn’t lose sight of the humanity of the patient, nor of the spiritual dimension of dying.*

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We don’t prepare people adequately to think about dying; instead we’re too much into hi-tech intervention technologies. We need to get control of medical technology, which is getting to be overwhelming. A lot of unnecessary things are done. The medicalization of death is expensive!

Today, there are three important ethical factors: a) informed consent and proxy decision-making; b) distinguishing between ordinary and extraordinary medical treatment; c) certitude: how sure do we have to be? Fr. Bouchard explained the relevance of each.

Fr. Bouchard also enumerated some of the choices to be made, especially regarding the choice to withhold or

withdraw treatment. The choice is made when you perceive that treatment isn’t doing any good any more.

Popular terms include “Quality of Life” and “Death With Dignity.” We may ask “What do these terms mean to Christians?” Fr. Bouchard clarified that “futile” medical care is when I decide that it’s not doing me any good. One example of futility is: “this drug has no effect.” A different kind of futility is when the patient perceives that the benefit is minor and the side-effect sickness is worse.

Concluding, Fr. Bouchard stressed that long ago, dying was a spiritual experience. A patient did not die alone. To-

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*“For Christians, dying is an adventure in Christ”*

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day, some people die alone and afraid. Everyone needs to be prepared for death, and hence needs to think it over. The slogan “For Christians, dying is an adventure in Christ” deserves attention. Physical life is not the end of the story.

Again, a Q&A session brought out points about the patient-physician relationship. When patients have a menu of options, they need to express their own values; but they may not actually understand those, so a physician has to decide what a given patient can absorb, and speak accordingly.

In the afternoon session, a panel was composed of Dr. Kornu, Fr. Bouchard, Mary Ann Wachtel (a grief-counselor at the St. Francis Xavier College Church), and Mary Beth Curran (a parish nurse at St. Margaret of Scotland). They fielded questions from the conference attendees, and exchanged viewpoints among themselves.



L to R: Fr. Charles Bouchard, Dr. Kimbell Kornu, Mary Beth Curran, Mary Ann Wachtel.

Bishop Salvatore R. Matano, Bishop of Rochester  
From Catholic Courier, Diocese of Rochester, New York May 4, 2016

In this issue of the Catholic Courier, I wish to take the opportunity to share with you my statement regarding physician-assisted suicide, in the event that you may not be aware of this statement on such a critical issue presently being debated by the New York State Legislature. The statement reads as follows:

Amidst the joys of this life there is one that looms high above all the others, the joy of parents who welcome their new-born child into their lives. When they cradle this precious gift of God in their arms, there are no words to express adequately the joy in their hearts. Heaven and earth unite in the marvelous gift of life. And so begins a journey for which there are no certain maps or charts. The course is filled with so many surprises and unexpected events, many joyous, some challenging, others disconcerting; there are anxious moments, times of worry and even heartaches. But through it all parents never stop embracing their children; theirs is a love without boundaries, unrestricted, forever alive and without question.

The precious life of the new-born child is the same precious life of the old and the frail, the weak and the suffering, the ill and the infirm, the distraught and the

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*As we care for the child so must we care  
for all persons in the vast spectrum  
of human life.*

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sorrowful. As we care for the child so must we care for all persons in the vast spectrum of human life. When we subjectively determine when life begins and ends, when it is viable or not, or when it is too burdensome to endure, we begin a path toward self-destruction. Life is no longer precious, but just another commodity in the business of living. Relativism becomes the absolute, and even the value of life itself is questioned.

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*The value of persons who are gravely ill  
and/or at the end of their lives  
is currently being questioned  
and their very lives threatened...*

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The value of persons who are gravely ill and/or at the end of their lives is currently being questioned and

their very lives threatened by a growing movement in our society to end life prematurely. Now pending in the New York State Legislature are two bills that would legalize physician-assisted suicide for patients diagnosed with a terminal illness. They are euphemistically titled the "End-of-Life Options Act" (S.3685/A.2129-A) and the "Patient Self-determination Act" (S.5814/A.5261-B). These proposals ask those in the medical profession, a vocation dedicated to the service of life, to assist in the termination of the very lives they have pledged to heal and to comfort at life's most critical moments. Dr. Herbert Hendin, the CEO and Medical Director of Suicide Prevention Initiatives in New York City, has urged New York lawmakers to reject the legalization of doctor-assisted suicide, and to focus instead on accessible quality end-

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*"[E]vidence suggests that good palliative  
medicine can help people face death with  
dignity; assisted suicide falls far short of  
that goal"*

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of-life care. He states: "[E]vidence suggests that good palliative medicine can help people face death with dignity; assisted suicide falls far short of that goal" (<http://noassistedsuicideny.org/in-state-resources/> see Suicide prevention Initiatives, New York City).

Dr. Michael Brescia, Executive Medical Director of Calvary Hospital in the Bronx, a specialty hospital serving advanced cancer patients, has recently noted that with groundbreaking advances in pain medicine, "the physical aspects of pain can be managed effectively for all patients. We have found that with attention, affection and high quality care, we can prevent patients from saying they want to die" <http://noassistedsuicideny.org/in-state-resources/> (see Calvary Hospital, Bronx, New York).

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*Clearly, then, the rejection of physician-as-  
sisted suicide is not solely a Catholic posi-  
tion, it is human rights imperative.*

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Clearly, then, the rejection of physician-assisted suicide is not solely a Catholic position, it is human rights

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imperative. The Catholic Church is the defender of Life in concert with physicians, nurses, pharmacists and other healthcare professionals; in union with these same people, we seek to protect people with physical and mental disabilities, those in life-threatening situations, and those who have no one to speak on their behalf, from being viewed as burdens to society when they are our sisters and brothers in the human family. What is needed is support for and the further exploration of healthcare measures that will effectively relieve suffering, so that the terminally ill might know and feel the love, concern, compassion and care of a society that protects them and cherishes them. This, in itself, eases the greatest pain, which attacks the heart when people feel no one cares!

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*The Catholic Church, united with persons of other faiths and people of good will, does care, especially for those who are the weakest among us!*

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The Catholic Church, united with persons of other faiths and people of good will, does care, especially for those who are the weakest among us! And our concern is not irrational. It is a very reasonable and noble concern, which appreciates the worth of the human person in this or her most difficult moments of life. In 2011, the United States Bishops stated: "Respect for life does not demand that we attempt to prolong life by using medical treatments that are ineffective or unduly burdensome. Nor does it mean we should deprive suffering patients of needed pain medications out of a misplaced or exaggerated fear that they might have the side effect of shortening life" ("To Live Each Day With Dignity: A Statement on Physician-Assisted Suicide," USCCB, July 2011, p. 10, <http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/assisted-suicide/to-live-each-day>.) The New York State Bishops, in their 2011 "Catholic Guide to End-of-Life Decision-Making, Now and at the Hour of Our Death," note that "out of deep respect for the gift of life, we must always accept, and others must provide, ordinary

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*Ordinary means are those that offer us a reasonable hope of benefit and would not entail excessive burden on us, our family, or the community"*

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medical means of preserving life. Ordinary means are

those that offer us a reasonable hope of benefit and would not entail excessive burden on us, our family, or the community" (p. 3, <http://www.nyscatholic.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/End-of-Life-booklet-final.pdf>.) But intentional euthanasia, the willful and

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*But intentional euthanasia, the willful and conscious act of putting to death those who are sick, are disabled, or are dying, is morally unacceptable and a tragic offense against life!*

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conscious act of putting to death those who are sick, are disabled, or are dying, is morally unacceptable and a tragic offense against life!

I urge New York State lawmakers to reject the legalization of physician-assisted suicide, for it will inevitably put tremendous pressure on our most vulnerable citizens to end their lives. As the New York State Task Force on Life and the Law cautioned many years ago (1994), in an era of health care rationing and cost-cutting, assisted suicide could easily rise to the level of the most acceptable, inexpensive, and even expected "treatment" for terminal illness. We owe our brothers and sisters in the human family so much more.

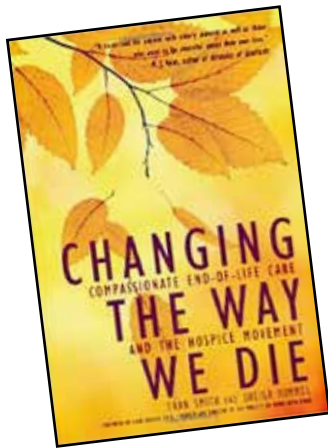
I pray that reason will prevail and be guided by an even greater Wisdom. Shakespeare said it well many years ago: "There's divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we may" (Hamlet, V .ii). Indeed there is One greater than ourselves and He said, "I have come so that they may have life and have it to the full" (John 10:10).

Asking the Lord to bless our efforts in the service of His gift of life and united in prayer for all our suffering brothers and sisters in the Jubilee Year of Mercy, I remain...

*"The mentally competent terminally ill patients have a right to refuse medical treatment in New York State, but doctors do not have the right to help them die."*

*Current situation as of May, 2016*

*Bishop Matano is a Providence, RI native holds a Doctorate in Canon Law from the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome. Before becoming the Ninth Bishop of Rochester, New York, Bishop Matano served as Assistant Chancellor for the Diocese of Providence going on to serve as Vicar General and Moderator of the Curia until 1997.*



## *Changing the Way We Die*

### A book on Hospice

by Fran Smith and Sheila Himmel (2016)

#### *Chapter One Excerpt*

All along, doctors differed on Rusty Hammer's prognosis. One told his wife, Pamela, "If he lasts five years, he'll be lucky." Another kept reassuring Rusty, "You never know. You're doing fine. Just get more rest."

He did last five years, and Pamela will always wonder whether the treatment was worth the torment.

Rusty was diagnosed with acute myelogenous leukemia, a rare and aggressive blood cancer. By the time he died, on Monday, Jan. 28, 2008, he had taken more than 250 medications, received more than 350 blood transfusions, had a stem cell transplant, and spent nearly 600 nights in six different hospitals. He developed severe diabetes and osteoporosis, heart and lung failure. He needed an oxygen tank to breathe and a shunt in his brain to relieve the pain. Visiting the doctor took all day, with the wheelchair, the drive, managing a hospital bed on the other end. It left them both

exhausted, and hopeless that their family's suffering would ever end.

But hospice care brought them comfort and calm. In the last six months of his life, Rusty enjoyed the company of family and friends. He explored his religious heritage. He wrote a book, and in a strange way he also became the author of his own experience — a person again, not a medical record number or an object to be handed from one specialist to another for yet another blast of debilitating treatment. The hospice team listened to him. Pamela found herself becoming a better listener, too.

This was not how Rusty thought of hospice when a friend first suggested it. He did not imagine an opportunity to reclaim his life, let alone do something new or grow.

*Available at Amazon.com and at  
<http://changingthewaywedie.com/book>*

#### ***ITEST Editorial Board Recommends:***

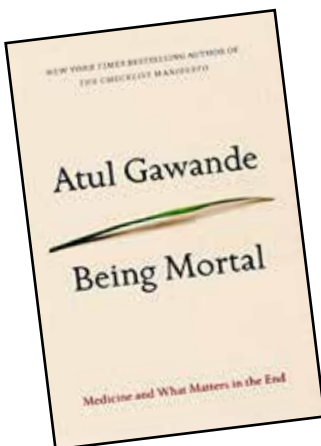
### *Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End*

by Atul Gawande, 2014.

"Gawande offers examples of freer, more socially fulfilling models for assisting the infirm and dependent elderly, and he explores the varieties of hospice care to demonstrate that a person's last weeks or months may be rich and dignified."

If anyone would like to submit a review of the book or the Audio CDs, please let us know.

*(Author of three bestselling books: Complications, Better, and The Checklist Manifesto, Gawande is a surgeon at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston, a staff writer for The New Yorker, and a professor at Harvard Medical School.)*



## Reflections On Some Responses to Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*

by Carla Mae Streeter, OP

Francis released his Apostolic Exhortation, "On the Joy of Love," on March 19, 2016, the Feast of St. Joseph. The document was the pope's long awaited response to the Synod on the Family, which concretized Francis' vision of the Church as a participative community engaged in a participative event. A questionnaire was issued beforehand, with the explicit invitation to speak freely on the issues. It was to be an experience of a truly *listening* Church.

What followed the publication of the Exhortation was a variety of responses. I will name two that the reader might want to pursue, while commenting mainly on one of them. The first response I reference appeared in *Commonweal* on May 20, 2016, and was entitled, "A Balancing Act: Reading 'Amoris Laetitia.'" The article featured perspectives from Peter Steinfelds, Paige E. Hochschild, William L. Portier, Sandra Yocum, and George Dennis O'Brien.

The second was a booklet in English, *Rebuilding Lives: Divorce, Welcome, and Communion*, published by Cristianisme i Justícia from Barcelona. It featured the responses of four Jesuits, Xavier Alegre Santamaria, "The Teaching of the Bible: What did Jesus say About Marriage?", José Ignacio González Faus, "Theological Approaches," Jesús Martínez Gordo, "Truth and Mercy: The Theological Cogency of Cardinal Kasper's Proposal," and Andrés Torres Queiruga, "The Ecclesiological Background: A Shepherd Pope Faced With Ecclesial Restorationism." The perspectives of Gordo will be the main focus of these reflections.

### What Francis Intends to Do in the Exhortation

In his seven paragraph introduction, Francis offers us a remarkable guiding statement: he states that "...not all discussions of doctrinal, moral or pastoral issues need to be settled by interventions of the magisterium." (3) With these words he acknowledges not only the true authority of the magisterium and its place, but affirms that the Holy Spirit operates significantly in the entire People of God, and all need to be attentive to this wide action.

Then he proceeds to sketch his approach to bring before all of us what he considers significant from the recent

synod. His first chapter will explore the scriptures. Chapter two will examine the actual situation of families in our day as he perceives it. The third chapter will reaffirm the Church's teaching on marriage and family. Two chapters will be dedicated to the nature of authentic loving, chapter four in marriage uniquely, and chapter five on love's distinctive fruitfulness. Chapter six will offer some pastoral approaches, specifically on marriage preparation. In chapter seven Francis will tackle the sensitive issue of the education of children, including a specific call for sound sex education. Chapter eight is dedicated to a call to the entire Church to accompany, discern, and integrate the weakness of unions that do not measure up to the ideal, and provide pastoral care for those who struggle in these situations. The balance Francis envisions means

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*"To show understanding in the face of exceptional situations never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal..."*

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"To show understanding in the face of exceptional situations never implies dimming the light of the fuller ideal..." (307) Finally in chapter nine, Francis offers a spirituality of marriage and the family. It is chapter eight, and the pope's explicit call for mercy in irregular situations, that in my view offers a refreshing affirmation of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the consciences of couples while simultaneously affirming the guidance of the wisdom of the Church's teachings. It is also the most controversial.

### The Focus of this Particular Reflection

Standing firmly on the balance principle above, I turn now to a specific section of Jesús Martínez Gordo's article, "Truth and Mercy: The Theological Cogency of Cardinal Kasper's Proposal." In section 3.4 of the article, Gordo asks the reader to identify the "it" that God has joined in marriage. Theologically, Gordo is asking for the *res* or substance that the marriage *ritual* signs to us.

Gordo begins by reminding us that for the Eucharist

*Continues on page 9*



itself to “last,” the matter of the sacrament, namely the bread and wine, must last. They must remain intact. If they dissolve, if they decay, then the Eucharistic presence, as sacrament, ceases in what remains. The “it” of the Eucharist as sacrament is the presence of

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*The “it” of the Eucharist as sacrament is the presence of the risen Christ in the elements.*

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the risen Christ in the elements. When the elements cease, the sacramental presence of Christ ceases to be present in the destroyed or corrupted remains.

Gordo wisely chooses the most central of the sacraments to make a point. When the matter or sensory element of a sacrament ceases, the divine active presence that is its substance ceases also in that local instance. The matter and form are inseparable, as modeled for us by the incarnation itself. The presence of the eternal Word of God was intact as the Christ suffered. That divinity was present as the sacred humanity died. It was present in the deceased body of Jesus in the tomb, and it was the Father who through and in the person of the Word, raised that sacred humanity from death.

Gordo then sides with Cardinal Kasper against the more rigid cardinals who interpret the “indissolubility of marriage” in a more literal manner. In doing so, interpreters such as Cardinal Cafarra blur the distinction between fallible teaching still in process of discussion, and infallible teaching which has clear and limited characteristics: the doctrine must be a truth revealed by God, proclaimed in a solemn act, requires an irrevocable response of faith, and excludes any contrary heretical proposition. The exact nature of the indissolubility question is clearly a work in progress and does not qualify according to the four criteria as infallible teaching.

The argument of Cardinal Kasper that Gordo supports is simply this: The human love and self-gift that is the matter of the sacrament of matrimony is a sign of the indissolubility of Christ’s love. When the human love dissolves, the matter of the sacrament in that case ceases. Thus the couple is no longer a sign of that indissoluble love. The sacrament ceases. It is not the human love that is indissoluble, but Christ’s. The human love is but its sign. When the sign dies, when

the love and self-gift ceases, the sacrament ceases. The couple no longer signs the ongoing reality of Christ’s love. One or both the man and woman can destroy this sign.

Gordo is presenting an argument for the Latin Catholic Church similar to that which has been long held by the Orthodox Church. A marriage can die. And when it does, one or both partners are free to attempt to sign that self-giving love with another. Divorce thus becomes the declaration of the death of a marriage, and remarriage becomes possible, because the self-giving love of Christ still seeks a living sacramental sign.

This understanding opens a new pastoral possibility. Access to the Eucharist for Catholics whose marriages have died becomes the healing for one or both persons to recover and again reach out in self-giving love. It is the Christ whose love never dies, whose union with us in the baptismal bond is indissoluble. Francis is asking that this pastoral mercy be discussed further in the

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*Amoris Laetitia is not a final word,  
but a call for the Church to move  
forward in mercy.*

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Latin Church. *Amoris Laetitia* is not a final word, but a call for the Church to move forward in mercy. It is a call for the development of doctrine into the fullness of its truth as it is lived in the lives of the People of God.

*Carla Mae Streeter, OP is professor emerita of systematic theology and spirituality at Aquinas Institute of Theology in St. Louis and a Board member of ITEST.*

***In Memoriam — ITEST Members***

***In this issue we recall two  
ITEST members who died in 2014:***

**Father Phil Hoebing, OFM**, long-time ITEST member, emeritus professor of philosophy at Quincy University in Illinois.

**Frank A. Andrews, PhD**, Captain US Navy (retired), graduate of the US Naval Academy, Professor of Physics at the Catholic University of America and loyal ITEST supporter.

We also ask you to pray for ITEST members who are ill. May they feel the restoring hand of the Lord.

## Book Review

### *Finding True Happiness*

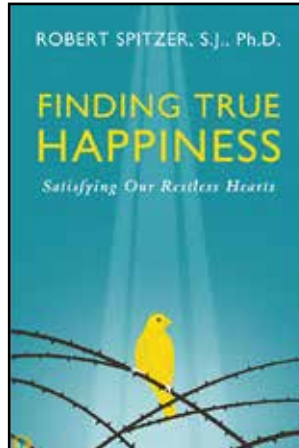
By Fr. Robert J. Spitzer, S.J.

Ignatius Press (2015) ISBN 978-1-58617-956-4

Reviewed by Thomas P. Sheahan

“My hope is not to give you a recipe book for cooking up some happiness,” says Father Robert J. Spitzer, S.J. in *Finding True Happiness*, “but rather to give you as many tools as I have to discovering the richness of yourself and your potential so that happiness follows from your pursuit of the good life.”

Father Spitzer has written a “quartet” of books where *Finding True Happiness* is the first in the sequence. Therein, four different levels of happiness are defined, and he explains why we should strive toward the fourth level. Because many readers are not familiar with the several levels of happiness, Fr. Spitzer carefully



especially for those who feel themselves to be at an impasse – not knowing whether to take their faith seriously or let it slip away.”

Chapter one opens with a dozen questions, and every reader is sure to identify

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*“happiness is at the root of every decision we make and every action we perform...”*

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*...our true destiny is toward transcendental happiness.*

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explains the differences as he builds the case that our true destiny is toward *transcendental* happiness.

The introduction to this first volume provides a road map of what each of the four books is about, and makes their relationships clear. Having established the importance of transcendence in the first volume, the second book (*The Soul's Upward Yearning*) presents the evidence for believing in God, contrasted against the nihilism of Freud and others in the popular media. The third book (*God So Loved the World*) brings the reader to the divinity of Jesus Christ. The final volume is about the problem of evil: *The Light Shines on in the Darkness: Contending with Suffering and Evil Through Faith*.

Spitzer notes that each book is for a different audience, owing to the progression through plateaus of understanding and faith that the series entails. The intended readers of *Finding True Happiness* are “young adults who are beginning their faith journey, and

with a few of those. This basic axiom is presented: “*happiness is at the root of every decision we make and every action we perform...*” and Spitzer goes on to show how essential this is. He defines four categories of happiness: The first means having food, clothing, shelter, etc. The second involves the ego and seeking the approval of other people: popularity, winning, honor, prestige, etc. Neither of these first two categories can ever deliver true happiness.

The third level is appreciating the goodness and welfare of others. We want our lives to be significant, and “we find ourselves wanting the world to be better off for our having lived.” The sense of purpose brings genuine happiness, even though every achievement is finite.

If level three brings out the best qualities of humanity, a still higher level of happiness is at the spiritual level, involving the *transcendentals* of love, goodness, beauty, truth, and being. Since the very existence of transcendentals is denied by the materialistic culture surrounding us, Spitzer is careful to demonstrate the reality of transcendentals.

He quotes a variety of 20th century scientists to argue that humans have a *transphysical* dimension. Sir Arthur Eddington understood the limits of physics and saw that man goes beyond them; Kurt Godel showed

*Continues on page 11*

that man's understanding rises above the physical: "...human intellection is not reducible to rules-based or algorithmic structures in the physical world or in the brain." Spitzer's synopsis of many other leading scientific and philosophical authors (some still alive) is indicative of "more to come." Recent advances in cosmology establish limits upon our universe and points to a *transphysical* Creator. [greater detail is in an appendix to volume 2, *The Soul's Upward Yearning*.]

Beyond the evidence from the physical world, we have within ourselves evidence of the transcendent, despite what Sigmund Freud said in *The Future of an Illusion*. Freud overlooked 4 important categories, and Spitzer cites the authors who got those right. In a summary of only 5 tightly-written pages, Spitzer explains why the *inner* sense of transcendence compliments the *outer* evidence from the physical world. Following this, the linkage between transcendence and happiness is readily established. "The more we open ourselves to a true transcendent power, the more that transcendent power responds to us." Spitzer emphasizes the importance of each individual exercising free will: "... God cannot do it for us. God does not want our

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*God does not want our relationship with Him to be only His decision, but our free decision as well.*

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relationship with Him to be only His decision, but our free decision as well."

Spitzer's chapter on "The Comparison Game" presents several useful charts showing how people compare their various states in life. Losers, Winners, and those caught in-between are engaged in that game, and they *never* obtain true happiness, because they're stuck in happiness levels 1 and 2. That leads only to existential emptiness. The pathway out is to strive toward levels 3 and 4, "...while making level One-Two desires the *means* to those ends." Material wealth and status can be employed to make a positive difference in our wider community, which is a step up to level 3. However, Spitzer emphasizes that *both* levels 3 and 4 must be there to reach fulfilment.

Spitzer presents a number of "tools" that individuals

can use to rise above whatever place they're stuck in. Several helpful charts guide the reader through questions like "What am I looking for in myself?", "What am I looking for in others?" and "What kind of freedom am I seeking?" Most people have probably never examined such questions in a structured way. Via this mechanism, Spitzer guides the reader upward toward levels 3 and 4. He cautions against falling into a level 3-4 "comparison game"; the two go together.

Chapter 5 is entitled *The Call of the Transcendent* and develops the theme that even the most successful of us feel "something missing," a *cosmic emptiness*, even when Level 3 happiness is present. Our perception of beauty – for example, in nature – pulls us in the direction of transcendence. After weaving together the responses of a wide range of authors over centuries, Spitzer concludes that it's necessary to take a *little* leap of faith. It's not a big leap, because the assembled evidence is persuasive.

Despite all the evidence, that "little leap of faith" is indispensable. Here is the key insight that Fr. Spitzer offers: "Even the most cogent reasonable arguments and the best evidence from physics, logic, mathematics, and medicine will not be able to perfectly ground trust in the loving God... God will not enslave us to a miracle. He will always leave room for us to escape His presence and reality, because He wants us to respond to His loving call with our own act of openness and love." In that way, God respects our freedom. Subsequently, Spitzer writes "We are not forced or manipulated into this relationship, but only invited into it. Therefore, we are free to respond in whatever way we choose. ... faith is fundamentally a free response to the invitation ... Though evidence for God, the soul, and even the love of God can help to rationally ground and solidify our faith, it cannot take the place of faith."

At first, this is *not* what someone trained in the physical sciences wants to hear. "Empirical evidence" and "rigorous proof" are supposed to be enough to satisfy anyone. But upon reflection, it's clear that Spitzer sees over the horizon beyond science. To have a relationship with a transcendental being (God) requires some transcendent action from us.

The important role of the Church in our encounter

*Continues on page 12*

with God is covered, and here we see a little better into the personality of Bob Spitzer the man. As he brings together many theologians over the centuries, we learn what an integrated grasp of the connection between Christ and the Church looks like. The reader wonders “could I ever be like that?”

Spitzer then explores different aspects of personal prayer: contemplation, divine inspiration and interior transformation. To start with a proper image of God, Spitzer counsels “Present your former false images of God to the Father and ask him to replace that false image of Him with the image that His Son revealed about Him.” Spitzer parses the *Our Father* line by line and shows how to make it a personal prayer. Likewise, the Rosary becomes a contemplative prayer. Ignatian contemplation and even silence are explained. The question of how to follow the Holy Spirit (and how to determine authenticity) comes up.

Spitzer explains what works and what doesn’t for different people. In one bit of humor, he recites this rather inept prayer: “Dear Lord, I am suffering, and in order to help You expedite a solution, I took the liberty of creating an action plan for You. ... I know You will see the wisdom of my ways, and I’m sure that You will follow this advice. Your loving servant, Bob.”

The occurrence of both good times and bad times is addressed, and Fr. Spitzer’s discussion of his own vision problems are particularly poignant – a remarkable account of the results of trusting in God that no obstacle will ever be too great. St. Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” line comes immediately to mind, as he turned a very serious physical handicap into a source of blessing and strength. Spitzer discerns quite clearly a “conspiracy of divine providence.”

Achieving an interior transformation is the topic of chapter 9, and here the importance of gratitude is emphasized. “This correlation between gratitude and happiness may help to explain why so many intelligent, gifted, privileged, and respected people are unhappy, while others who have much less are fulfilled and content.”

The final chapter, on *Transcendent Happiness*, assembles the pieces. Aware that it’s always easy to slip back into a mood of emptiness and alienation, Spitzer emphasizes the importance of assisting others toward spiritual fulfillment. “We are not only helping *others*

to be transformed in their transcendental dignity; we are also transformed in it as well. This fills us with a sense of inspiration, fulfillment, and joy.” There is a special joy in the Church community, as it brings about level 4 happiness. “Doing service with and for God (and Christ) is qualitatively different from doing service on level 3 because the love of God enhances love of neighbor, and love of neighbor enhances love of God – precisely as Jesus promised.” One special feature of this chapter is the way Spitzer ties together the writings of saints, theologians and philosophers across the ages.

Later in the chapter, Spitzer brings up the topics of suffering and evil, which are the subject of his fourth volume in the quartet of books. Suffering *can* be transformed into a source of joy on level 4, when seen in a transcendent light. Addressing the cosmic struggle between good and evil, younger readers especially will appreciate the references to Frodo Baggins, Harry Potter and Obi-Wan Kenobi.

Finally, he closes with a very optimistic view, noting the way God watches out for us: “This interior assurance of God’s personal love and salvific intent brings a transformative peace and joy into our minds, hearts, and lives. We are changed by our awareness of the transcendent love and joy for which we are destined.”

*Finding True Happiness* is an outstanding book on several levels. The fact that everyone seeks happiness is the perfect starting point for every reader, young or old. The reader already attentive to the transcendentals will see how the entire spectrum of happiness fits together. The early collegian reader may discover that there *is* a way to approach the “big picture”; realizing that higher levels of happiness are possible, well beyond early levels of satisfaction. Being able to see the *progression* across consecutive levels is an extremely important insight. “I never thought of it that way” will be a common experience throughout the book.

*I recommend Finding True Happiness very highly. It is the best book I’ve read this year.*

## Why You Should Read ‘The Great Divorce,’ by CS Lewis

By Bishop Robert Barron on Apr 26, 2016 06:29 pm

(From YouTube Word on Fire)

In my capacity as regional bishop of the Santa Barbara pastoral region, which covers two entire counties north of Los Angeles, I am obliged to spend a good deal of time in the car. To make the long trips a bit easier, I have gotten back into the habit of listening to audio books. Just recently, I followed, with rapt attention, a book that I had read many years ago but which I had, I confess, largely forgotten: C.S. Lewis’ *The Great Divorce*. The inspiration for this theological fantasy is the medieval idea of the *refrigerium*, the refreshment or vacation from Hell granted to some of the souls abiding there. So Lewis’ narrator leaves the dreary streets of the underworld and, with a coterie of other ghosts, journeys by flying bus to a lovely land that he comes to realize is the forecourt of Heaven. In that enchanted place, the ghosts meet a number of denizens from the heavenly world, who attempt to lure the poor souls out of their misery.

Lewis was that rare sort of genius, able to combine high theological insight with vivid imagination, and it is precisely this coming-together that makes his writing so memorable. I would like to rehearse a number of motifs from this story that struck me as being of particular spiritual significance. The first has to do with the paradox of the grandeur and nothingness of Hell. Lewis’s narrator tells us that the streets and residences of Hell stretch out so far that it requires centuries of travel to get from one end of the city to the other. This immensity is due to the fact that the citizens of that awful place just want to get as far away from one another as possible. Further, when the bus travels from Hell to Heaven, it seems to go far up into the air and to cover an enormous distance. However, when the narrator, in dialogue with a heavenly spirit, wonders where precisely Hell is in relation to the heavenly realm, the spirit bends down, pulls a single blade of grass and uses its tip to indicate a tiny, barely perceptible, fissure in the ground. “That’s where you came in,” he explains. All of Hell, which seemed so immense to the narrator, would fit into a practically microscopic space in Heaven. Lewis is illustrating here the Augustinian principle that sin is the state of

being *incurvatus in se* (curved in around oneself). It is the reduction of reality to the infinitely small space of the ego’s concerns and preoccupations. Love, on the contrary, which is the very life of Heaven, is the opening to reality in its fullness; it amounts to a breaking through of the buffered and claustrophobic self; it is the activity of the *magna anima* (the great soul). We think our own little ego-centric worlds are so impressive, but to those who are truly open to reality, they are less than nothing.

One of the sad ghosts that Lewis describes carries on his shoulder a rather loathsome reptile who whispers suggestions in companion’s ear. It is eminently clear—even to the ghost himself—that this creature is doing nothing but harm. An angel approaches and places his hands around the lizard and calmly asks the ghost, “May I kill it?” At this, the fallen spirit recoils and commences to make excuses for the thing on his shoulder. “May I kill it?” the angel solemnly asks once again. The ghost balks and becomes uneasy. “May I kill it?” inquires the angel. Finally, the ghost acquiesces and the angel crushes the life out of the reptile, at which point the ghost begins to harden into something greater and more substantial. And the lizard, thought to be dead, begins to metamorphose into a stately stallion. When both ghost and reptile have been thoroughly transformed, the man mounts

*(We recommend Bishop Barron’s new series of DVDs study program entitled “Catholicism: The Pivotal Players” “Discover the figures who shaped the Church and changed the world.” This series is available on Amazon.com as well as from Word on Fire. Some of the saints, artists, scholars and mystics covered in the series: St. Francis, St. Thomas Aquinas, blessed John Henry Newman, St. Catherine of Siena, G.K. Chesterton and Michelangelo, among others.)*

“Purgatory is learning how to forgive.”

- Carl Dehne, SJ

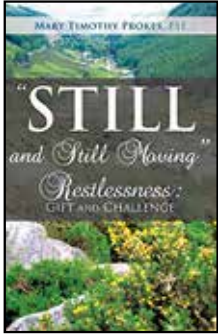
**New Books**

**“Still and Still Moving”\* *Restlessness: Gift and Challenge***

By Mary Timothy Prokes, FSE

www.xulonpress.com

© 2016 by Mary Timothy Prokes pp. 290.



From the author: “Why write a book on restlessness? Isn’t it obvious that in this present time we are experiencing a restiveness that is eating away at the heart of faith, culture, the very meaning of humanity? For that very reason it is important to focus on the difference between positive restlessness and forms of restiveness that are destructive. An insatiable restlessness is inherent in the human heart, an impulse toward fulfillment in an eternal love that exceeds human imagination and invention. Further, a marvelous restlessness pervades all that exists, all that moves toward an unknown moment when even the finest of present existence will give way to ‘a new heaven and a new earth.’” (Introduction)

\*Taken from T. S. Eliot’s poem “East Coker.”

Sister Mary Timothy Prokes, FSE, PhD, is a Franciscan Sis-

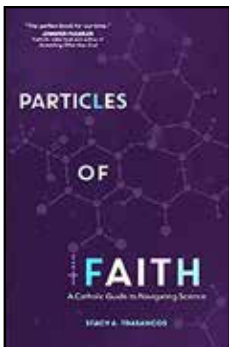
ter of the Eucharist Her previous books include *Women’s Challenge: Ministry in the Flesh*; *Mutuality: The Human Image of Divine Love*; *Toward a Theology of the Body*; and *At the Interface: Theology and Virtual Reality*. Currently she is a member of her Community’s retreat team and offers elective courses at St. Meinrad Seminary and School of Theology in Indiana. (from the publisher) Sister Mary Timothy shared a close friendship with ITEST’s late director, Robert Brungs, SJ, and remains an active, supportive ITEST member. She has contributed a number of papers and essays for our workshops, conferences and publications. Among her specialties is the study of the theology of the body, in which she brings valuable theological insights to the thought of St John Paul II on his well-known writings on the body.

You may purchase the book at Amazon.com as a Kindle e-book at \$8.98 or as a Paperback for \$16.99. Highly recommended by ITEST Editors

***Particles of Faith: A Catholic Guide to Navigating Science***

By Dr. Stacy Trasancos

Ave Maria Press, October, 2016



“What is the origin of life? Hasn’t the Catholic Church always been hostile to science? Can a Christian accept the scientific theory of evolution?”

“How can you, as a Catholic, explain what the Church teaches about the relationship between science and faith? Scientist, writer, and scholar Stacy Trasancos gives us ways we can talk about how science and our Catholic faith work together to reveal the truth of Christ through the beauty of his creation.”

“As a scientist who was led to Catholicism through her work, Stacy Trasancos has confronted some of the basic questions we all face. In *Particles of Faith*, she teaches us how to explain the symbiotic beauty between our curiosity expressed through science and our love of Christ and his Church.”

“Trasancos uses her own story, as well as encyclicals such as Pope Francis’s *Lumen Fidei*, the deep reflections of theologians such as St. Thomas Aquinas, and the exacting work of Catholic scientists like Rev. Georges Lemaître (who proposed the game-changing Big Bang theory), to show how

science and faith are interwoven and meant to guide us on the path to truth.”

“By the time you finish reading *Particles of Faith*, you’ll be able to answer questions about, generate discussion on, and explain why science helps deepen your faith.” (from description of the publisher, Ave Maria Press)”

Stacy A. Trasancos is a Catholic writer, scientist, editor, and teacher who also serves as editor emeritus of *Catholic Stand*, which she cofounded. She is a contributor to *National Catholic Register*, *Integrated Catholic Life*, and *Strange Notions*, teaches chemistry and physics classes and is department chair at *Kolbe Academy*, and serves as an adjunct professor at *Holy Apostles College and Seminary* and *Seton Hall University*. She is the author of *Science Was Born of Christianity*. Stacy serves as a member of the ITEST Board of directors and has initiated lively conversations on the ITEST Facebook page which she designed and monitors. She works from her family’s 100-year old restored lodge in the Adirondack mountains, where her husband and children (and two German Shepherds) remain her favorite priorities.

*(We have chosen to highlight the news of Dr. Allan Willingham's death in a special way because Allan was one of the earliest official members of ITEST)*

### **In Memoriam**

Dr. Allan K. Willingham

July 11, 1941 – September 7, 2016

We extend our deepest sympathies and prayers to Virginia (“Ginny”) beloved wife of Allan Willingham, on Allan’s sudden death and rising to New Life on September 7.

Dr. Willingham taught biochemistry at the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine until his retirement several years ago. Although his profession was in the sciences, he also cared deeply for those in need evident from his involvement in the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

Allan, along with a “faithful cohort” joined ITEST during the early days of its formation in the late 60s and early 70s. Allan’s sense of joy embraced all he met – no dour Christian, he!

We at ITEST remember fondly the times Allan and the rest of the “faithful cohort” attended the twice yearly ITEST workshops and conferences in St Louis. Allan, Bob Morey, John Matschiner, Robert Herwick, Bob Bertram, Thad Niemira, Father Donald Keefe, SJ and Father Brungs were a wonderful “Band of Brothers.” Their joy and loyalty to ITEST was evident. Long after some of the less “hardy” participants of the conference retired for the night, far into the late evening, laughter, echoed through the halls of Fordyce House. Yes, it was that group; yet everyone felt drawn to join the crowd where many friendships were formed for years to come. And these men were generous, both with their time and their financial support.

Now only Fr. Don Keefe, Thad Niemira, Bob Morey and Bob Herwick remain to carry the spirit of that group . We are confident that the founding fathers of ITEST, who are in Heaven with the newly arrived Allan, are having a marvelous time enjoying each other’s company, debating profound ideas and delighting God with their heavenly joyfulness.

It is remarkable that 10 years after the death of our founder and director, Fr. Brungs, SJ, the first few verses of the second reading chosen for Allan’s Funeral Mass was Romans 14:7-9, 10b-12 – the same scripture passage Fr. Brungs had pre-selected for his own funeral. Is there some kind of Heavenly synchronicity occurring here? Only God and the “faithful cohort” know.

## **Idolatry in Science**

by Thomas P. Sheahen

Among scientists who attend to topics of religion, one of the most famous quotes from the 20th century is this couplet by Pope John Paul II, circa 1987:

- Science can purify religion from error and superstition;
- Religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes.

I doubt that many scientists have ever thought much about the word “idolatry”; the typical reaction would be “who, me?” In science, it’s hard to imagine what the word “idolatry” could possibly mean.

Separately, “The Teaching Company” publishes CDs and

DVDs on a wide assortment of course materials, including one series on world religions, which contains one set on Hinduism. Within that, there is a remarkably concise definition of idolatry: confusing your own concept (or model or image) with the actual reality.

Whether in Hinduism or Christianity or any other religion, that’s a pretty clear warning not to think that your own understanding of God is fully accurate. When the Ten Commandments prohibits making graven images, we immediately think of physical objects like a golden calf standing in for a god, and of course we see the folly of that,

*Continues on page 16*

and take the warning seriously. Several faiths disapprove of any images at all, lest those inferior representations become the object of worship.

About the only graven-image superstition still around today is the essentially humorous custom of burying a statue of some patron-saint-of-realtors in your back yard, in order to make your house sell faster. That gets a chuckle out of almost everyone, including the folks who plant the statue.

But now let's think about science, and examine that Hindu definition of idolatry again. For several centuries now, we have had some scientific models of nature that are exceptionally good. Newton's Classical Mechanics is perhaps the earliest really good example. It accounted for things in motion on earth, and even for the motions of the planets. When slight abnormalities were found, LaPlace introduced perturbation theory to explain them. By the late 19th century, Classical Mechanics was so good and so complete that scientists believed the world was deterministic. Scientists had a very good theory, and believed it represented nature perfectly.

That was idolatry: thinking that your model truly represented the underlying reality. Around the turn of the 20th century, nobody thought to call it idolatry, but churchmen who accepted the prevailing scientific theory found themselves backed into a corner trying to defend the notion of free will. It was a difficult time for religion.

Events of the 20th century exploded that particular idolatry, and today we have "The Standard Model," a combination of Quantum Chromodynamics and General Relativity. It's an uneasy partnership, with many physicists attentive to the need to patch things together and refine the model. There may be a danger of once again believing that a new model represents nature perfectly, as suggested by Hawking and Mlodinow's 2010 book "The Grand Design." All physicists wish for a "theory of everything," so the temptation toward idolatry will always be there. Forebearance against that temptation is a virtue owned by those who remember the history of physics.

The thing that saved physics is the predominance of observational data over theory. Richard Feynman's famous quote is taught to every grad student: "It doesn't matter how beautiful your theory is, it doesn't matter how smart you are. If it doesn't agree with experiment, it's wrong." Today physicists are puzzling about dark matter and dark energy, because data trumps theory. The phrase

"facts are stubborn things" comes to mind. It is theory that has to change. Idolatry is not allowed.

Meanwhile, over in the life sciences, the theory of Evolution has great explanatory power, and is far more comprehensive than any alternative theory. The combination of Darwin's three cornerstone principles (random mutation, natural selection, and deep time) coupled with knowledge of DNA and genetics gives us the "Neo-Darwinian Synthesis," which is virtually unassailable. A large majority are convinced that this model represents nature perfectly. This belief is so dominant that you're better off changing careers rather than challenging it. To an objection like "time isn't deep enough," or "there is irreducible complexity," the prevailing orthodoxy of biology imperiously responds that pretty soon those annoying little discrepancies will be figured out, so get out of the way. There is only a very faint echo of Pope John Paul II's words cautioning against idolatry.

A new temptation towards idolatry has arisen along with the advances in computing power. Enormously complex models of the climate of the entire globe run on supercomputers, and the output results are sold as accurate representations of what nature does and what it will do. National and international policies about energy supplies are driven by decisions stemming from belief in these models. There is enormous momentum behind their predictions, mostly provided by people who don't actually know the science itself, but want to believe that scientific models account for nature perfectly. Cautionary phrases like "mathematical chaos" and "data first" go unheeded in the rush to believe in a perfect theory.

This is one very pernicious example of idolatry, because when the policy decisions are implemented, the impoverished countries of the world are denied the energy sources they need to improve their economies. If religious leaders across the world stood up and called this belief in computer models "idolatry," it would be a good first step toward re-focusing international attention on practical solutions to contemporary problems facing humanity.

Idolatry has been a recurring stain across all of human history, and each time one form is eliminated, it pops our somewhere else. Within science, recurring instances of idolatry slip by unnoticed, allowed to propagate unchallenged for long periods of time.

Religion can purify science from idolatry and false absolutes.