



Institute For Theological Encounter With Science and Technology

Volume 51 - #3

Summer 2020 Bulletin

Praying During Pandemic

We are in the midst of a *pandemic*, and no one alive today has any memory of the great pandemic of 1918. With no prior experience of anything like this, we don't know what to do; so we follow the instructions of civic authorities, but they don't have all the answers either. We also strive to pray. But, not knowing what to pray for, it's hard to believe that my meager little prayers count for much in a situation this enormous.

It is built into human nature to limit our thoughts (and our prayers as well) to a size that matches our own very finite boundaries. It's hard to actually grasp the concept that God is infinite, when we are so terribly limited. Our image of God is much weaker than God really is.

Perhaps the hardest thing for nearly all people to understand is that God is *not* dependent upon time, nor does He experience the passage of time the way humans do. God transcends time; God created time; God is merely *present* to all time; God is not conditioned or bound by time. For a prayer in 2016 to survive an intricate medical operation, God can answer it by having a child born in 1966 that grows up to become a brilliant surgeon. That makes no sense at all within the conventional human perception of time; but God's way is frequently *not* the conventional human way.

It is fruitless, almost humorous, to ask God to take this or that specific action. Fr. Bob Spitzer, S.J., in his book *Finding True Happiness*, offered this spoof of an overly-prescriptive 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 think the best way of taking me through this suffering can be elucidated in six steps ... I'm sure that you will follow this advice. Your loving servant, Bob." Spitzer then quips, "This prayer generally leads to disappointment, bewilderment about why God didn't follow our plan, and desolate thoughts like 'Are you there?'"

What will be the outcome of the COVID-19 pandemic? Will I, and everybody I know and love, suffer only a mild affliction? That seems like a reasonable thing to pray for. But then think of all the secondary consequences of economic disruption, the unexpected misery that will interrupt so many lives; surely we should pray for mitigation of that, as well. Before long we're into Spitzer's comic "six steps" prescription.

The flaw here is in seeking "a reasonable thing to pray for." We don't want to burden God too much by praying for *everybody*. That comes from imagining a *finite* God, a God who has to pick and choose among alternatives. Thinking that way is kind of insulting to God.

God has already given mankind some very useful tools to fight this pandemic: DNA sequencing, gene-splicing, etc. Right in the middle of the pandemic today, it's hard to fathom a prayer of thanksgiving. But the world is unlikely to repeat the full debacle of 1918; and if we achieve a vaccine in a short time, we can thank God for directing medical researchers down the right pathways again and again over many years.

— Thomas P. Sheahen

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Announcements

ITEST Fall Webinar

Do You Want to be Genetically Engineered?

Saturday, October 10, 2020

1:00 to 4:00 pm (Central time)

This webinar will be led by Fr. Kevin FitzGerald, S.J., who holds a Ph.D. in Molecular Genetics and a Ph.D. in Bioethics. After webinar participants receive an introduction to genetic manipulation, they will explore considerations of what is practical, moral, and ethical when it comes to genetic engineering. There will be ample time for discussion.

To help prepare for the webinar, resources can be found at <https://faithscience.org/genetic-engineering/>.

Thank you Archbishop Robert Carlson!

Welcome Archbishop-designate Mitchell Rozanski!

The headquarters for ITEST is in St. Louis, Missouri at the Cardinal Rigali Center, which holds the headquarters and curia for the Archdiocese of St. Louis. We are grateful for the opportunity to keep our office here and for the support of the archdiocese. On the eve of Archbishop Robert J. Carlson's retirement, we wish to express our sincere gratitude for his support of ITEST over his 11 years as Archbishop of St. Louis.

We are excited to announce that St. Louis will have a new archbishop when Most Reverend Mitchell T. Rozanski of the Diocese of Springfield, Massachusetts is installed on August 25 as the 10th Archbishop of St. Louis. A native of Baltimore and Polish-American by heritage, his episcopal motto is to "Serve the Lord with Gladness." Please join us in welcoming him to St. Louis and welcoming him as a **new member of ITEST!**

In Memoriam

In years past, we have included a section of the bulletin called *In Memoriam* to recognize and pray for ITEST members who have died and entered into eternal life. Recently we published a necrology of our "Cloud of Witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) on our website at <https://faithscience.org/our-cloud-of-witnesses/>. Please send us a message at itest@archstl.org if you would like to add a deceased member to our list or if you would like to suggest changes to the entries.

Did you know...

... that among our "Cloud of Witnesses" we have a *Servant of God*? Dr. Jérôme Lejeune was an ITEST member in the 1990s.

Jérôme Lejeune made enormously important contributions to the field of genetics. He discovered the cause of Down syndrome, or trisomy 21: a third chromosome in the 21st pair. Dedicating his career to the protection of children with Down syndrome, he grieved that his genetic discoveries were used against the unborn, with a majority of children with a Down syndrome prenatal diagnosis being aborted. "Today, I lost my Nobel Prize in Medicine," he wrote in a letter to his wife in 1969. Lejeune had just received a prestigious award from the American Society of Human Genetics and gave a speech in which he strongly opposed abortion. His work was obviously worth the Nobel Prize in Medicine, but that was not to be. Pope John Paul II appointed Dr. Lejeune to the Pontifical Academy of Science in 1981 and later named him the first president of the Pontifical Academy of Life. Lejeune's cause for canonization was opened in 2007.

Servant of God, Jérôme Lejeune, pray for us!



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ITEST Bulletin - Ralph Olliges, PhD, Editor, S. Marianne Postiglione, RSM, Senior Editor
Sheila Roth, Managing Editor ISSN 1073-5976 • Copyright © 2020

Letter to the Editor

From Bob Slocum, commenting on coronavirus and social media, *ITEST Bulletin* Volume 51, #2; Dr. Slocum refers to 5D, a spiritual formation program promoted in the *ITEST Bulletin* Vol. 51, #2. Details can be found at www.5dbiblestudy.com/.

Sister Marianne, Once again, greetings from Texas. I wanted to take a minute to comment on your article which is very timely for the lock-down we are experiencing. I first thought of the “inside joke” that came up with every Lenten season during the eleven years I worked on 5D with the University of Dallas Chapel. When asked what I would sacrifice for Lent, I could smile and say that whatever you are doing for Lent, Presbyterians believed you should be doing all year long! But you make a painful point that we are sacrificing Christian community and community worship during the lock-down. This hits home because my wife’s recent affliction with neck arthritis kept us out of our 5D community for three semesters, and we remarked over lunch today that we felt we “had lost our place and community.” On a positive note, during our time with the University of Dallas 5D Study, we met from 10:30 to 12:00, so the entire 5D group (70 to 90 folks) worshiped together at the 9:00 Mass. It was a wonderful Scripture study and worship experience, and our priest said he could feel a spiritual lift during the Mass not present in the other services. My first choice is to package 5D with a strong worship service! I learned Friday that, in general, on-line worship viewership is dropping rapidly. But Zoom has kept our Church and two of the 5D studies going to the end of this semester. Thanks for your encouragement to Zoom on with our worship communities.

I want to also thank you for the ITEST exposure for 5D. It has provided momentum to launch a couple of other 5D projects. Grad Resources, a ministry to Grad students, used the 5D videos for a six week Zoom spiritual development project with University of Nebraska grad students and faculty. I learned Friday that Bakke Graduate University will introduce a new on-line course on training and launching 5D studies. Brad Smith, BGU President, recently said there was a world-wide market for discipleship-making programs, and he asked me to write up my description of the 5D Study as a discipleship program.

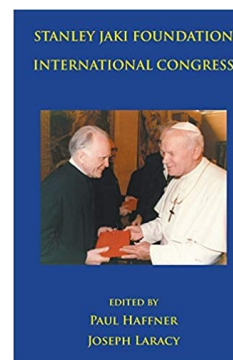
— Dr. Robert E. Slocum

See this article from our friends at the *Magis Center*. Justina Miller takes the material written by Dr. Ralph Olliges from the Winter issue of the *ITEST Bulletin* and creates an insightful piece.

https://magiscenter.com/new-insights-on-the-rise-of-the-nones/?utm_source=Newsletter+88.0&utm_campaign=Magis+Newsletter+88.0&utm_medium=email

More Announcements

Father Paul Haffner and ITEST member, Father Joseph Laracy, recently published this edited volume from the most recent Stanley Jaki Congress. It was a wonderful event in which a diverse, international group of scholars with expertise in fields such as philosophy, theology, chemistry, physics, engineering, and computer science, gathered at Seton Hall University (SHU) in South Orange, New Jersey. Find the book on amazon.com.



If you love the work of ITEST, then tell the world! Did you know that behind recommendations from friends and families, reviews impact volunteering and donating decisions? Won't you help us raise visibility for our work by posting a review of your experience on GreatNonprofits—a review site like Yelp, but for nonprofits? All reviews will be visible to potential donors and volunteers.

It's easy and only takes three minutes! Go to <https://greatnonprofits.org/institute-for-theological-encounter-with-science-and-technology-to-get-started/>

Do you enjoy ITEST webinars? ITEST is raising money to support its mediated activities in 2020 in response to COVID-19. This past academic year, we hosted four excellent webinars: *Is Evolution Catholic?*, *COVID-19 and Man's Continued Desire for God*, *the Shroud of Turin*, and *Screen Time During COVID-19 and Beyond*. Watch them free of charge through our website! To keep us going, please make a donation through this [Go Fund Me](#) or send a donation to our address in St. Louis. Thanks in advance for your contribution to this cause that means so much to our Christian faith!

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Human Genome Editing -- A Catholic Perspective

Synopsis of an article by Fr. Kevin FitzGerald, S.J.

The full article was originally published as “Human Genome Editing: A Catholic Perspective” in the Spring 2017 issue of *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* © The National Catholic Bioethics Center. Reprinted by permission at <https://faithscience.org/human-genome-editing-a-catholic-perspective/>

The intent of the paper is contained in this early sentence:

“The distinctive reasoning and values of the Catholic Church provides a framework for achieving the goods of human genome editing while avoiding its harms, especially to the most vulnerable in our societies.”

FitzGerald begins by recalling that in the latter 19th century, the discoveries of Gregor Mendel and Francis Galton began to advance the science of genetics. Unfortunately, Galton’s attention was directed toward eugenics, and the Catholic Church strongly opposed eugenic programs.

“the Church employed extensive public information campaigns and lobbied the government to protect vulnerable communities from eugenic proposals, such as compulsory sterilization and restrictions on immigration from undesirable countries.” “And at the center of this half-century struggle with eugenics was an unchanging vision of the primacy of all human life.”

FitzGerald then adds:

“This unchanging vision of the primacy of all human life remains at the core of the Catholic Church’s contribution to the global discussion about how to evaluate and employ the revolutionary advances in medical genetics and genomics. To understand this critical contribution, it will help to focus on three specific aspects of this Catholic moral tradition: (1) why the Church attaches special significance to the primacy of human life, (2) how the vision of this primacy has developed in response to advances in medical genetic technology, and (3) how the resultant vision of the primacy of human life will be useful, even crucial, in the ongoing global discussion about human genome editing.”

He quotes sections of *Gaudium et Spes* and several subsequent papal documents, to demonstrate how the Church reaches the conclusion:

“To achieve this goal as a Church required an institutional commitment to support health care.”

Meanwhile, across the early 20th century, Mendel’s discoveries became foundational for modern genetics, and led researchers toward DNA and the genetic code, which has been the pathway of all genetic advances for over half a century by now. Indeed, those advances have accelerated in

recent decades. The Church’s focus continues to be rooted in human dignity. Regarding rapidly developing biotechnology, FitzGerald asks “... how it might improve the health care the Church desires for all?”

Regarding gene therapy, *Dignitas personae* provides excellent foresight and guidance. Summarizing those principles, FitzGerald writes:

“The benefits of a procedure must be proportionately greater than the risks it poses to health or physical integrity, so one should not use genetic interventions for cosmetic purposes. Since germline interventions present risks to future generations, they require a level of safety that has not been demonstrated yet and must not involve procedures, such as IVF, that destroy human lives. However, therapeutic modifications to germline cells might not be ruled out if adequately safe procedures and outcomes can be obtained. Finally, the use of genetics to enhance or change human nature to create supposedly improved beings is rejected on the basis of the same reasoning that inspired the Church to resist the eugenics movement of the twentieth century.”

Looking to the future, the critical question is “how will the vision of the primacy of each human life be useful, even crucial, in the ongoing global discussion of human genome editing?” The remainder of FitzGerald’s paper (most of it) is then devoted to the topic:

“The Catholic Contribution to Current Challenges in Human Genome Editing”

Perhaps the strongest attraction today is toward genetic enhancement, which brings back the specter of eugenics, per Galton’s 19th-century goals:

“Still, it is argued that some genetic enhancements would be truly beneficial for human beings. Academic and popular literature are full of proposals for enhanced immune systems, better memories, increased intelligence, a heightened sense of empathy, delay or prevention of the aging process, and even simply increased height. Both Galton and Plato shared the goal of selectively increasing the intelligence and health of certain individuals.”

FitzGerald examines the question of using gene therapy to achieve a specific health goal. Writing in 2017, his example

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was HIV/AIDS, but in 2020 it might be the current COVID-19 virus. He reaches this key point about the distinction between therapeutics and enhancement.

“The resolution of all these issues, however, depends, at least in part, on addressing this distinction between genetic enhancement and genetic therapy, because their differences rest on the definitions of health and disease, which are at the foundation of medicine.”

The very definition of what is “normal” comes into play. Also, there are trade-offs to be made, and side-effects to be endured. An example derives from actual observations of a group of people in Ecuador. Parents typically would like to increase the height of a short child, but what if that increases the odds of getting diabetes or cancer? Our very limited understanding of the intricacies of genetic editing opens up many concerns and questions of this type.

One possible approach is to let people do what they like. Because of the ready availability of amniocentesis, this has led to sex-selection abortions, most notably in China and India, where a female child is a financial burden; a girl’s life is not worth continuing. When many parents make that choice, the society at large suffers an imbalance of the sex-ratio, with adverse consequences. FitzGerald states that this

“indicates the need to develop ethical and policy approaches to human genome editing that can balance individual and community goods and goals, especially when they conflict.”

The question comes down to “how will we know when we are ready to apply genome editing technology to human beings in a way that will provide broad benefits and avoid harms?” It is at this point that the Catholic Church, with its emphasis on the dignity of every human life, has something important to say. But still, implementing that isn’t simple.

“Accepting this Catholic standard of universal care does not necessarily clarify what kind of help we should offer to whom and when. Here again, discerning the appropriate genomic intervention requires a complex yet balanced understanding of individual, community, and species health. This, in turn, demands a comprehensive, integrated, and dynamic framework for understanding human nature and health in order to keep up with both the rapid pace of scientific discovery and the diverse global responses to it.”

How do we “get it right?” FitzGerald draws attention to the words of Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*, and supplements that with a quote from Pope Francis’ encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium*, (“*On the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World*”). In particular, in the section titled “Dialogue between Faith, Reason and Science,” it says in part

“Whereas positivism and scientism ‘refuse to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences,’ the Church proposes another path, which calls for a synthesis between the responsible use of methods proper to the empirical sciences and other areas of knowledge such as philosophy, theology, as well as faith itself, which elevates us to the mystery transcending nature and human intelligence. Faith is not fearful of reason; on the contrary, it seeks and trusts reason, since “the light of reason and the light of faith both come from God” and cannot contradict each other.”

That certainly is a viewpoint that ITEST strives to articulate.

In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis further developed the theme of incorporating ethics into research. FitzGerald notes that many scientists disdain such concerns, but he reminds the reader of the wretched history of eugenics, when a utilitarian ethic prevailed. To those who are dismissive toward any input from religion, FitzGerald presents a counter-argument of the enduring relevance of religious thinking across the ages, “... in weaving the rich tapestry of human understanding that will be required to ensure that global deliberation will benefit both individuals in need and humankind as a whole.” FitzGerald re-asserts the history of the Church’s contribution:

“The Catholic Church has much to contribute as a facilitator of this global public engagement. It has its long and extensive history in health care, a powerful vision of the fundamental value of each human being, and the need to care for human beings in all dimensions and stages of life. In addition, the Church has traditionally promoted scientific inquiry and has worked to integrate technological advances in ways that foster the common good.

Through both its interaction with science and technology and its desire to fulfill each human life, the Church ... [is ideally suited to] ... contribute to the discussion of how all peoples might determine the best applications of human genome editing for the various needs and aspirations of our current age.”

Finally, he offers this look forward:

“Human genome editing is just the latest technology humankind has developed with its God-given abilities. The Catholic Church needs to address it with all the values, skills, and wisdom the Church has developed from its past, to help ensure that this technology and all future ones will be used for the betterment of all, especially the poor and the most vulnerable.”

—*Synopsis prepared by Tom Sheahan*

An Invitation to Explore a Topic: Squeezing God into Time

By Thomas P. Sheahen

I've been watching the TV show "Father Spitzer's Universe" on EWTN on most Wednesdays for the past five years. His intended format is to spend the first half answering questions sent in by viewers, and then go on to a new topic in the latter half of the show. In practice, however, he spends about 40 minutes on viewer questions, and only about 15 minutes on a new topic.

Five years ago he would receive few questions and was treating all the topics I really like, such as the creation of the universe, the Anthropic Coincidences, etc. The volume of traffic has picked up a lot since then.

For many of the contemporary questions, I roll my eyes and think, "They're squeezing God into time!" Disproportionately, the incoming questions these days deal with topics along the lines of, "How can I shave off some of my time in purgatory?" Recall the practice of a millennium ago when people would sit out on the steps of the cathedral for 300 days shouting "O God be merciful to me a sinner" and thus earn an "indulgence" worth 300 days' time in purgatory. That practice got to be such a major time sink in life that people wouldn't go to confession until they were on their deathbeds. Then in the 1500's the practice of "buying" an indulgence began and Martin Luther found that intolerable, a total deal-breaker. To this day, most Protestant denominations simply reject the notion of purgatory.

The people sending in questions currently still seem to have a very time-specific concept of purgatory. Spitzer strives to avoid being pinned down to clock-time, speaking instead of the need for a phase of "purgation" before you can enter heaven. But he still slips into the "time" concept on nearly every question.

I have written previously against the idea of associating "time" with the spiritual dimensions. But the very clear reality is that ordinary people who fill the pews are incapable of thinking in any other way except a sequential-time concept. They very much believe that God is keeping score within a time-dependent framework. If I were to talk directly with Spitzer, we would agree that our spiritual life cannot be measured with a clock; but I wonder if even he thinks that "time marches on." My concept that at death we are separated from both the spatial dimen-

sions and the time dimension (but life goes on in some other way) is a notion that never gets any attention, because it is so difficult for people to think about dimensions that are completely freed from time. The very time-dependent question, "What's next?" is always in the foreground.

I have also said that people make a huge mistake when they imagine that God is constrained within the framework of time; I say that's putting a false god (i.e., time) ahead of the true God, who is the Creator of time. I might get people to vaguely nod in agreement, but operationally they still go back to their everyday concepts, which are based upon the Newtonian-classical-physics picture of time as an absolute that has always been there and always will be.

Maybe there are a handful of theology students at Catholic seminaries who have previously studied Einstein's General Relativity, and they might be able to grasp that the universe has been expanding in both space and time ever since the moment of creation. But even that specialized knowledge of physics will be pushed aside when they have to deal with parishioners who pay most attention to the goal of trimming down their time in purgatory.

St. Augustine (~ 400 A.D.) explained that the word "before" has no meaning until after God created time. St. Paul's famous line "Eye has not seen and ear has not heard . . ." tells us to disconnect our expectations about heaven from the limits of space and time. But nobody paid any attention to either of them. The literary work *The Divine Comedy* by Dante, together with many Renaissance paintings based on those images, have established the picture that most Christians have today.

No wonder the atheists are drawing away the younger generation so rapidly these days. Our own teammates believe in a very finite and limited God who dwells within time and is subject to time. That's a fairly easy target for atheists to shoot at. Defending an "after-life" that has the clock running is a losing enterprise.

It would actually be much better if our own folks would come right out and say "I don't know how God does it, but . . ." and freely acknowledge their faith and dependence upon God.

See the next few pages for a discussion on Tom's article.

Discussion of Tom Sheahan's article, *Squeezing God into Time*

Fr. Kevin FitzGerald's response

I think your assessment that the vast majority of people are time bound in their thinking is correct. I once gave a talk in DC and during the Q&A after my talk got into a discussion with a Nobel Laureate who could not get past the fact that a "good" God would allow bad things to happen to good people (e.g., earthquakes) when He knew they were about to happen. I responded that God is outside of time so "things are going to happen" was not a concept binding upon God's action as God already knows what was, is, and is going to be. All just **IS** to God. The Nobel winner was totally mystified by that idea and so just dismissed it and returned to his argument that no good God would let bad things happen to good people. Such is the anthropomorphizing of God most people do regardless of education. Good thing God is able to get past that!

Fr. Kevin FitzGerald, S.J., Ph.D., Ph.D., is the John A. Creighton University Professor, and an associate professor in the School of Medicine, Department of Medical Education, at Creighton University.

Patrick Panozzo's response

Two related thoughts came to me when reading your email. The first is how much of our Scripture and worship is built around the concept of time, particularly its fulfillment. The Incarnation is extraordinary because God interrupted time in order to become one of us, and surely time and place matter a great deal in the telling of that story. But even before God's entry into time on Earth, the Chosen People are tied to a history that longs for the future. How many of the Psalms do we sing/pray each and every Advent *waiting* for a time when God will reign forever? Waiting in joyful hope seems reasonably ingrained into the Catholic imagination. By extension, this may have a lot to do with our popular understanding of purgatory even if the former speaks to the Final Judgment and the latter to our particular judgment.

And that leads to my second thought. The venerable Scripture scholar N.T. Wright says contemporary Christianity reflects an understanding of heaven that is not supported by the Bible whatsoever. In fact, heaven is not the goal expressed by any of the New Testament authors. Rather, time will come to fulfillment when a new order has been established and we become a new creation *here on earth*. Heaven and earth will be united in the same manner that God united humanity and divinity in the person of Christ. There is much more here than can be articulated in a few sentences, but again Catholics/Christians are bound by time and waiting, not for so much for eternity in heaven, but for the

new creation on earth (the resurrection of the body). Now it seems to me we have a whole new set of questions about God, the created universe, and material reality that go beyond the complexities of time. God, of course, isn't bound or restricted by any one of them.

To Fr. Kevin's comment, my favorite literary insight into the explanation you provided to the Nobel Laureate is found in the last few pages of C.S. Lewis's *The Great Divorce*. (Spoiler) The narrator learns only after a lengthy journey through "purgatory" that Time is merely a lens through which we see without perfect clarity. Then a vision shows him the Truth is something like our immortal souls moving chess pieces on a chess board where the board is Time itself, and the game is a reflection of eternal choices made long ago or even anticipations of choices made at the end of all things. It's an attempt to avoid the debate between Free Will and Predestination, though he does admit freedom is the superior attribute of Truth.

Patrick Panozzo has been a high school teacher of theology for 18 years. His work is predominantly focused on Scripture, ecclesiology, and the Sacraments.

Mariette Baxendale's response

Beautiful. Thought provoking, for sure. My thought is not directly on the topic, rather it is that my students would never be able to understand this if they were to read it! I wonder how these concepts could be presented to someone who is not a theologian, not a philosopher - rather to a teen/young adult, someone who is questioning their faith? How can we help make whatever we present understandable, applicable and important to them and their lives? Who are our readers? Whom do we serve? Have we ever given out a survey as far as the demographics of our ITEST members? Please know the intent of my input is not to be dismissive of the content as this is awesome metacognition stuff, but a reminder for us to be cognizant of whom we are trying to serve and our mechanisms for outreach and evangelization. Our group email exchanges have been good food for us, and I have utilized resources from them in the classroom. But in a publication material meant for outreach, the topic we are currently discussing is largely inaccessible to our young people if they are the demographic we are trying to access through the bulletin and other means. Thoughts?

Mariette Baxendale, Ph.D., is a teacher of biology at De Smet Jesuit High School in St. Louis. She focuses on teaching science through the light of faith.

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Patrick's response to Mariette

Perfectly relevant and important point you bring to our attention. I do agree with you that meeting your audience where they are is essential, but knowing who they are is primary to even that.

For the record, I do have these conversations with my students. I would likely not use Tom's email or an episode of *Father Spitzer's Universe* as the discussion starter, but I have used a clip of it! They are assigned to read *The Great Divorce* by C.S. Lewis (many really enjoy it, some do not, most can follow it.) and the idea of time and space and the cosmos and creation and eternity are among the topics my students (15-17 years old) get the most excited and interested in. My thought here is that they are expected to engage the STEM curriculum at a college prep level, so theology and philosophy (dare I say metaphysics) should not take a back seat.

Bishop Barron cites "dumbed down Catholicism" as one of the leading causes for young people leaving the Church. The relevant anecdote begins at the 3:50 mark:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZkPH1rOAG0>

Mariette's response

Thanks, Patrick! Agreed with all that you have said. I was generalizing with my thoughts as we don't want to underestimate our young people with how deeply they can think - my boys' reflections on *From Nothing to Cosmos* can attest to that. I would love for us to create a shared document into which we can upload teaching ideas and resources for this level. I am a biologist but not a theology teacher but incorporate faith as much as I can in my biology classroom and have given my physics and chemistry teachers resources to induce faith-science conversations in their classes. This is where I'm coming from. If we want to expand these conversations beyond theology and physics, how would it look in my biology classroom? In other classrooms?

Interested in joining this discussion?

Feel free to post responses on our Facebook page under the post titled

"An Invitation to Explore a Topic"

<https://www.facebook.com/Institute-for-Theological-Encounter-with-Science-and-Technology-113896963350713/>

Tom's response

In the Bob Barron film, speaking of a high-schooler, he notes that she's reading *Hamlet*, *Aeneid*, etc. and then he adds so memorably "She's reading a comic book for religion." The religion curriculum has been dumbed down. As Mariette and others have shown, the videos by Fr. Spitzer are well within their range of interest and comprehension. Things like *The Reason Series* and *From Nothing to Cosmos* present a challenge, and the students respond to that challenge! Reversing the "dumbing down" is a very urgent task for everyone concerned with Catholic education.

And by the way, despite many fine pronouncements about the importance of the STEM curriculum, in fact a lot of science education has been dumbed down compared to yesteryear. Nobody learns how to invert a matrix anymore. Angular momentum is commonly left out of the physics curriculum. Lots of chemicals are not allowed in high school chemistry labs, because they can cause harm if misused.

Dr. Thomas P. Sheahen has been Director of ITEST since 2008. His previous career was predominantly concerned with energy sciences, including superconductivity, nuclear power, and energy policy.

Sister Marianne's response to Tom

Your essay is excellent. If high school students can get through higher math, science and all the other difficult subjects, they can easily understand your essay. I would not "dumb it down." However, Patrick makes some good points.

A few things: He mentions N.T. Wright, a very popular Protestant theologian whom Bishop Barron quotes occasionally. I have read, and enjoyed his monumental book on St. Paul and other books of his. I am pretty sure I have his on Heaven as he sees it and as Patrick reports. I would love to get S. Carla Mae's input on Patrick's few paragraphs. After all, Scripture does talk a lot about "the new creation in Christ." Don Keefe used to talk about it often. So, perhaps Wright is "right." Glad to see too that Patrick is a devotee of C.S. Lewis. I try to reread *The Great Divorce* every year or so. There is a new lesson for me every time I reread it.

Another thought on time. A venerable old Jesuit, Carl Dehne, once said, during a homily on November 2 when asked to define purgatory, "Purgatory is learning how to forgive." I thought that was fantastic and have used it many times since when discussing purgatory with anyone. Most of the time I get blank stares or, "Gee, that doesn't sound right to me; it doesn't explain the time element." "Of course it doesn't you oaf," I want to reply, but I try to stay po-

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lite. However, Tom, even that short sentence does have some element of time in it with the word “learning.” Yet, Carl Dehne’s explanation of the term purgatory suits me just fine.

Sister Marianne Postiglione, RSM, is Associate Director of ITEST and Senior Editor of the ITEST Bulletin. Sister has been the backbone of ITEST for over 30 years.

Sister Carla Mae’s response

Marianne brings up a good point in reference to Father Dehne’s explanation of purgatory as “learning how to forgive.” Pope St. John XXIII once said that it is one thing to believe a doctrine, but quite another to communicate it effectively. I suggest that what moved Marianne so much with “Purgatory is learning how to forgive . . .” is the way Father Dehne was preaching about it. He was using personal language, not the language he had learned in theology class. This language gives meaning to the words for us personally, not just expression to the doctrine.

This brings up an important point. The heart of good evangelization is good communication, and good communication means transposition as in music. It means transposing from technical, doctrinal, theological language to the language of the man and woman on the street, and yes, to the language of the student in the classroom. This is the key to good teaching and good preaching. If the transposition is good the speaker connects. In our distinct disciplines of biology, physics, theology, etc., there is a certain jargon understood by those in that discipline. But to me, what you say might be like a foreign language! And for you, what I might say theologically might go right over your head. Translate for me please. Speak to me in language that grabs me, shakes me, fills me with awe, makes me weep.

Some examples: Purgatory as a doctrine is scripturally based because “nothing impure can appear before the face of God” comes straight out of scripture. That there is a “place” where souls are being “burned clean” or cauterized from sin, is a pure theological invention made solid in our minds from the time of the Black Death when bodies so piled up from the plague that all folks could do was burn them. Burning destroyed the decomposition and the plague itself. So quite naturally, fire was connected with purgatory and hell. Yet in Dante, hell is a frozen place. The opposite image is used. So it is important to note that all theologies are human constructs. The very nature of theology is humans drawing meaning from doctrine.

An example of this is an experience I had back in the 80’s when I taught freshmen undergraduates. The course was called Adult Christianity and I could not take for granted that the young men and women in front of me had an adequate

Catholic religious formation. So I printed out a copy of the Nicene Creed, asked them to get into their discussion groups, and look over this familiar text that they recited each Sunday at Mass. The assignment was to give me back any phrase or line that they would not be able to explain to their children. After the giggling stopped, they went to work. They handed me back the entire Creed. They could recite all of it, but they could not explain any of it. They didn’t understand what the words meant. So they were ready for theology. They had questions galore, and we were off running for the semester. We had a ball. When we finished, they could explain the basis of the Creed to their future children. Their reflections in their notebooks told me they were anything but bored. Some of their writing moved me to tears.

So theology really has the same challenge as science. We need to transpose the theological or scientific facts, drawn from credible sources, into the language that connects with folks who are not privy to these disciplines. We need to help them understand. This is the heart of what Tom was saying, what Patrick was exploring with a deeper understanding of how the second coming might be already here, growing up from the grass-roots, and how Mariette and Kevin cautioned us finally not to “dumb down” religious meaning. Theology explores possibility. It is what humans do. If we are wise we will do it humbly, knowing our efforts might not even be coming close to what we are trying to explain. Science has its unknowns, and so moves on in natural faith until scientists can back up their hunches with empirical evidence. Theology rests on the credibility of its sources. Then it goes to work explaining what these revelations might mean for our time/space lives, or for our transformed humanness in eternity. Back to Tom: **time/space has its physics. Eternity has its own, and we dare not impose one upon the other. We have been put in charge to care for one, and we bow in worship before the other as it permeates time/space to help us fulfill our charge.**

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China Weaponizes Global Trade to Become a Colonial Empire

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Globalization must not be a new version of colonialism — John Paul II, 2001

Will the extreme volatility of U.S. equity markets, the massive declines in production and employment, and the large and growing numbers of deaths here and around the world, all attributable more or less to a coronavirus that originated several months ago in China, finally awaken the American people and their leaders to the realization that China is a predatory trading partner¹ that is committed to reducing the United States to a Chinese colony?

China does not want to trade with the United States. It wants to dominate. Specifically, it wants to colonize. In the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries European countries established and administered colonial empires based on trading manufactured goods for natural resources. Textiles for cocoa. Plows for timber. Iron cooking pots for diamonds. In many instances, that kind of trade was not enough. The imperial powers took slaves and indentured servants. In the twenty-first century. China has been acting like a colonial power, trading whatever it is able to manufacture as the world's low-cost producer (absolute advantage) for American economic and financial independence. Like the monarchs of old, President Xi Jinping now is China's lifetime ruler. Benevolence is not his forte.

Two and one-half centuries ago, American colonists declared their independence from King George III of England. Last century Americans paid dearly so they would not be ruled by tyrants from Germany, Japan, or Russia. Two years ago President Trump began imposing tariffs on U.S. imports from China hoping that they would force the Chinese to the negotiating table to work on a better trade agreement. In a sense he was trying to break U.S. dependence on China and help restore American sovereignty. Earlier this year he signed a trade agreement that he described as just a first-step in changing the terms and conditions of trade with China.

¹ Robinson (2019) uses that very same expression in his expose of China global trading practices which incorporates comments on investments in Chinese sovereign bonds by U.S. investors including pension funds and university endowment funds.

Continuous, unfettered free trade where China has no obligation other than to its own self-interest undermines the promise that both the Chinese and the Americans can expect to experience economic and financial gains through the trading process and ultimately leads to a China using absolute advantage to sweep most of the gains off the table and an America left with the scraps.

Without the moderating influence of justice, absolute advantage in the hands of an unscrupulous trader transforms globalization into colonialism

Whenever there are no restraints on using absolute advantage at every turn, the market system cannot assure that free trade is fair for everyone involved. Justice is needed whereby both parties regard one another as equals, respect one another, and resist any opportunity to turn proper gain for both into ill-gotten gain for one. Without the moderating influence of justice, absolute advantage in the hands of an unscrupulous trader transforms globalization into colonialism, an outcome that Pope John Paul II warned about nearly 20 years ago.

China is preparing a new plan "China Standards 2035" that aims at achieving Chinese world dominance in next-generation technologies. This plan follows China's already implemented plan to dominate world manufacturing (Kharpal 2020). More than 50 years ago the Soviet Union made clear its intention to defeat capitalism and replace it with socialism. Some Western commentators and journalists at that time said that Premier Nikita Khrushchev really meant his "we will bury you." Spokespersons for the Kremlin denied that was his intent. (CIA 2002).

In a detailed history of Soviet trade practices since 1914, Boles (1954) stated that since the end of WWII

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the Soviets had targeted its satellites in Eastern and Central Europe for oil and agricultural products, and its communist partners in China for iron, coal, manganese, tin, wood and oils, and Southeast Asia for rice, rubber, and tin. He predicted that their next move would be trade with the Near East. Boles concluded that the Soviet Union was intent on an end-game of spreading communism around the world. The evidence regarding the global trade practices of China, exporting finished goods as compared to the Soviet Union importing natural resources, points to the same political objective. Domination.

Public opinion since COVID-19 suggests that the American people may be ready to join President Trump in pushing back on China. According to the Pew Research Center, fifteen years ago 35 percent of Americans had an unfavorable opinion of China. Today two of three Americans are unfavorably disposed toward China (Devlin and others 2020).

If, however, the present crisis fails to awaken Americans to this new global reality because they have been anesthetized by trillions of dollars pouring out of Washington, the Founding Fathers will know that their heirs have put being fed ahead of being free.

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Ed O'Boyle's comments:

The connection to the coronavirus is that the enormous impact of this virus has opened our eyes to the way China conducts global trading. It uses absolute advantage to destroy the international competition and control the market. Its purpose is to reduce its main rival -- the United States -- to a Chinese colony. Before I started research for this paper I didn't know that the Bank of China has over a dozen locations in North America. I didn't know that the Chinese Chamber of Commerce has several offices in U.S. big cities, that Chinese investors own GE Appliances, Smithfield Foods, and many more. That in the first four months of 2020 the FDA issued more than 50 alerts for food products imported from China. That just scratches the surface.



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The entire report is at <https://faithscience.org/china-weaponizes-global-trade-to-become-a-colonial-empire/>

Opinion/Summary: “Where the *Hell* is God in all This”?

by Sister Marianne Postiglione, RSM

I am not given to using or appreciating vulgar language - usually. Yet, in the quote above I heard the cry of a mother seeing her daughter severely injured in an accident leaving her partially paralyzed with a dim prognosis. A cry of the heart? Certainly! Would God be offended by this language? Not my God.

Father Michael Coutts, SJ, during his homily at our daily “streamed” Mass, recounted the story. It is not necessary to repeat it here, but the response of his heart revealed a deep truth of our Christian faith, **“God is not a Rescuer; God is a Redeemer.”** That might provide nothing more than cold comfort to a distraught mother; nonetheless it is true.

How does all this relate to the present pandemic? My initial intention was to provide a short summary of one or two current articles on COVID-19 from recent issues of *Science News* (SN) with links to the articles for those who wished to read more detailed information. Then something or someone intervened – perhaps the Holy Spirit—impelling me to change direction.

As I read and studied the material, absorbing terms and words like “endothelial cells”, “thromboinflammation”, “D-dimer”, anti-coagulants and descriptions of drugs like hydroxychloroquine, dexamethasone, and remdesivir, the latter shown in certain instances “... to shorten recovery time for seriously ill patients” (SN: 5/1/20), my inclination was to write about COVID-19 not only from the scientific but from the faith perspective. “Where the *Hell* is God in all This?”

But first let’s look at the science side. Admittedly, I was a bit surprised after reading the first article by science writer Tina Hesman Saey, titled: “*The steroid dexamethasone is the first drug shown to reduce COVID-19 deaths.*” However, the body of the letter revealed that the success of the drug was minor (“[it] ...could prevent one death for every eight patients on ventilation”). Many scientists who did not support the claim called for more testing on larger popu-

lations. In a conversation with a nurse working in a trauma unit at a large city hospital treating COVID patients on ventilators, I learned that health care professionals used the drug dexamethasone rarely. The article however, achieves a certain balance since Hesman Saey quotes one of the opposing scientists at the conclusion who states that, “When I go into the ICU next week, I don’t plan on using dexamethasone unless I can see the data and we can discuss it as a critical care community.” For the complete article: <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/steroid-dexamethasone-reduce-covid-19-coronavirus-deaths> *Science News*, June 16, 2020.

Because space is limited I will simply list the link to the second recommended article: “*Preventing dangerous blood clots from COVID-19 is proving tricky*” by Aimee Cunningham, *Science News*, June 23, 2020 <https://www.sciencenews.org/article/covid-19-coronavirus-preventing-dangerous-blood-clots-lungs>.

Returning to the second aspect: that of faith we might echo the plaint of the grieving mother, “Where the *hell* is God in all this?”

God is at the side of the scientist working to discover a vaccine for COVID-19; God is at the bedside of a patient, lungs ravaged with the virus, struggling to breathe; God is at the gravesite comforting the family of a loved one who died of COVID-19; God is present with the Catholic community praying six feet apart, hungering for the Eucharist, in small and large churches around the world; God is with the lonely elderly at nursing homes quarantined from their families with little or no personal contact. I invite you to complete the list.

Where is God in all this? Hell has nothing to do with it.

Has God protected us from the coronavirus? Perhaps. But, again another pertinent quote from a different Jesuit rings true, “God does not protect us; God sustains us.”