



FiRST Principles

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Introduction of *FiRST Principles*

Welcome to the bulletin of ITEST, now re-branded as *FiRST Principles* journal (Faith, Reason, Science, and Technology)! The general nature of the bulletin will not change, and we consider this to be a continuation of the great legacy of earlier editions of the *ITEST Bulletin*. The new name expresses the high quality of content so that the non-member public, colleagues, and libraries can recognize the great value of the publication.

In this issue, we highlight two articles that discuss the moral and scientific implications of gender dysphoria and same-sex attraction. Among their arguments, the authors take important stands on the relationship and priority between faith and science.

Comparisons of faith and science very often rely on a consequential and sometimes misunderstood statement by St. Thomas Aquinas:

Although the truth of Christian faith surpasses the ability of reason, nevertheless those things that are naturally instilled in human reason cannot be opposed to this truth. For it is clear that those things which are implanted in reason by nature, are most true, so much so that it is impossible to think them false.

Summa Contra Gentiles I, c.7

St. Thomas refers in this passage to the revealed or deduced articles of faith and the principles of reason with which we are all endowed by nature. However, in contemporary discussions of the relationship and priority of faith and science, we are not usually dealing with the articles of faith themselves, but further deductions of moral and fundamental theology; nor are we deliberating about the naturally known principles of reason, but instead the inductive findings of experimental science and the experience of our sense perception. What we most often grapple with in faith-science debates is not directly the relation of faith and reason, but a comparison of different projects of reason.

The ideology of modernism/scientism declares experimental and empirical science to be the sole preserve of reason. With God’s grace, however, we know that the exclusion of authority, emotion, spirituality, contemplation, and love from the rational projects of humanity contradicts our experience of reality. The ideology of modernism/scientism therefore distorts the subjective perception, experience, and understanding that experimental science ultimately depends on. It runs counter to the divinely revealed truths about man and God, and it undermines our certain relationship to our world as an intimately knowable and lovable environment.

As St. Thomas tells us, faith and science both derive from a burning love instilled in us by our Creator. “All truth irrespective of who expresses it, comes from the Holy Spirit” (*Summa Theologica* I-II, q.109, a.1).

On that we can depend.

Most Sincerely,

Christopher M. Reilly, ThD

Editor, *FiRST Principles*

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Announcements

ITEST Webinars

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Date	Title	Presenters	Watch/Register link
11/16/24	Christ, Science, and Reason: What We Can Know About Jesus, Mary, and Miracles	Fr. Robert Spitzer, SJ, PhD Thomas P. Sheahen, PhD	https://faithscience.org/christ-science-reason/
12/14/24	Black Holes and Free Will: How Faith and Science Rely on One Another	Mattheus Uijtewaal, PhD Bishop Everard de Jong	https://faithscience.org/black-holes-and-free-will/

Register now for these webinars.

02/22/25	The Anthropic Principle, “Are we special?” Did God make our “Goldilocks Universe” for man?	Robert Kurland, PhD William M. Briggs, PhD	https://faithscience.org/anthropic-principle/
04/05/25	AI and Sin: How Today's Technology Motivates Evil	Christopher M. Reilly, ThD Jordan J. Wales, PhD	https://faithscience.org/ai-and-sin/

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Book Recommendation

Without God Nothing Makes Sense

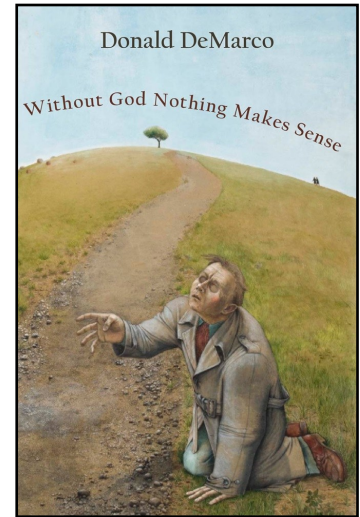
by Dr. Donald DeMarco

Donald DeMarco’s *Without God Nothing Makes Sense* argues that removing God from public discourse leads to societal confusion and moral decay. DeMarco critiques ideologies like radical feminism, atheism, and the pro-abortion lobby, identifying their rejection of divine truths as sources of division and intellectual blindness. He emphasizes the importance of virtues such as lightheartedness, kindness, and warmheartedness, which align with faith in God and serve as antidotes to societal fragmentation.

DeMarco explores themes across language, morality, education, philosophy, politics, and religion, linking them to the broader implications of a society detached from its spiritual roots. By grounding his discussion in figures like Aquinas, Chesterton, and Augustine, he defends the integration of faith and reason. He critiques secularism’s reduction of language, the exaltation of choice, and the rejection of human dignity, arguing these trends undermine the inherent value of life and truth.

The book advocates for a return to spiritual and moral clarity by aligning human laws with divine wisdom, highlighting the irreplaceable role of religion in sustaining justice and charity. DeMarco asserts that ignoring God’s voice in creation, scripture, and Christ leads to personal and societal disarray. Ultimately, he calls for humility, faith, and the embrace of divine truths to restore meaning and harmony in life.

Find this book at <https://enroutebooksandmedia.com/withoutgodnothingmakesense/>.



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Member Spotlight

Mary Lou Caspers, PhD

From first grade through my BS degree in Chemistry, I attended Catholic schools. At Mercy High School in Farmington, Michigan, Sister Renee - who taught Chemistry - introduced us to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. Later, at the University of Detroit (now, the University of Detroit Mercy), I took a course on his theological writings as they related to science. It became apparent to me that science and theology are intertwined.

The professor who taught this course introduced us to ITEST, and later, I became a member. Over the years, I have read the articles in the *ITEST Bulletins* and attended one of the ITEST meetings in St. Louis. Now that I am a professor at the University of Detroit Mercy, I have had the opportunity to discuss my studies in biochemistry with my colleagues in our science and theology departments. Through these discussions, once again it has become obvious to me that these areas go well together. As a scientist, I can study the laws of nature that God created in all its splendor and detail.

Some time ago, I was reading an article about the discovery of the humanoids who preceded humans in evolution, and a student saw the article. She asked if I believed in God and how I could reconcile evolution with a belief in God and in the teachings in Genesis regarding creation. I responded that evolution is a natural process that occurs over a long period of time. Because God created time and all the other laws of nature, God also created evolution. I



explained that the Bible contains religious truths, but it is not a science textbook and that the “days” of creation could have happened over millions of years.

Here in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry, I helped to develop and have taught a course for our senior chemistry and biochemistry students that looks at the new findings in chemistry/biochemistry and how these technical advances impact all organisms on earth. Particular emphasis is placed on the ethics of these technological advances. In addition to reading articles from

the major science journals, the students form teams and write an essay on the topic of their choice. In this essay, they explore the ethical considerations of the research in addition to the technical advances. They then give an oral presentation on their topic to the rest of the class and lead a discussion of their topic. Some of the topics have included: “Are there benefits/dangers for the consumption of genetically engineered rice or wheat?”; “What are the prospects for eliminating malaria in the wild?”; “What are ethical considerations for experimenting with human brain tissue?”; “Discuss the ethics of some of the DNA editing studies that may be applied to human illnesses and embryos in the near future.”

Here at the University of Detroit Mercy, we prepare many undergraduate students for acceptance into medical and dental schools, and these science/ethical studies will influence them as they discuss treatments of their patients’ illnesses. ■

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Transgender Health at the Intersection of Theology, Science, and Politics

by Fr. Charles E. Bouchard, OP, PhD and Peter J. Smith, MD, MA

A number of issues have emerged in recent years that have become political wedges, exacerbating the cultural divisions that threaten our country. Same-sex marriage, homosexuality itself, LGBTQ civil rights, and abortion all have created controversy and division. But perhaps none is as problematic as the care of transgender persons and their health, primarily because transgender experience is unfamiliar to most of us and because even scientists and clinicians do not fully understand it. We will try to untangle some of the confusion by citing a number of important distinctions that may help us think more clearly about this issue.

The first author's introduction to issues of transgender health occurred when he worked for the Catholic Health Association. It was occasioned by Regulation 1557 of the Affordable Care Act (<https://www.hhs.gov/civil-rights/for-individuals/section-1557/index.html>) which added "gender identity" to the traditional categories (e.g., sex, race, age) that are protected from discrimination. This regulation was debated for several years until it was finally approved in April 2024.

Catholic health care was immediately concerned since the rule appeared to compel us to provide some services (e.g., breast enhancement and reduction, facial surgery) to trans persons on the same basis as we provide them to other patients. Refusing to provide these procedures to persons who sought them as part of gender transition would now violate federal law and open our hospitals to lawsuits. This has already happened.¹

Trans health involves far more than legal rights.

Trans health involves far more than legal rights. There are several unresolved clinical issues as well. The most basic clinical question is whether surgical and chemical interventions for gender dysphoria (the symptom) and gender incongruence (the condition) are "medically indicated," i.e., are these treatments effective and safe for this condition? Another important question is what we mean by "gender-affirming care." Does it mean the whole gamut of treatment,

or does it mean respectful, high-quality care even if it does not include all available therapeutic options?

There are also questions about the causes of gender dysphoria and gender incongruence. Is it a psychiatric disorder that can only be treated psychologically? Is it permanent or transient? Is it a choice based on a cultural fad and on an ill-defined "gender ideology," or is it a medical condition? How should candidates be assessed and diagnosed? Is treatment for children ever permissible? Are minors able to understand their condition and provide informed consent?

We still do not have certainty about some of these questions, but we believe we have reached a broad medical consensus about many of them. This consensus is largely the work of WPATH, the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. It has published detailed *Standards of Care*, now in their eighth edition,² that covers the above questions plus many more detailed clinical issues. Other professional societies including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the Endocrine Society, and the American Medical Association (AMA) have endorsed gender affirming care and/or issued guidelines similar to those in the WPATH *Standards*. Some smaller groups such as the Catholic Medical Association and the American College of Pediatricians remain opposed. Many insurance companies (e.g., Aetna) as well as the federal government and the military now cover transgender care under their plans.

It seems to us that from a clinical perspective this consensus includes at least the following things.

- Gender dysphoria and gender incongruence are diagnosable conditions that are distinct from any gender ideology or cultural trend.
- The origin of gender incongruence appears to potentially be the result of prenatal hormonal influences that cause the formation of sexual organs (physical sex) early in pregnancy and the formation of "brain sex" later in pregnancy. This split in timing makes it therefore possible that there could be variance, or incongruence, between the two.³
- Gender incongruence can be treated effectively and safely with psychotherapy, hormonal therapy, and in some cases, surgery. It is important to note, however, that the journey of each trans person is

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unique. Awareness of one's trans identity can occur anytime from very early childhood to late adulthood and treatment plans vary. Some trans people seek hormone therapy, some seek surgery, and some are content with only "social transition" (with no hormone treatment or surgery).

- There are so-called "desisters," those who go through or consider treatment and then have a change of heart and seek reversal or abandon the process. The number of desisters is debated, but it appears to be very small. The vast majority of persons who go through various levels of transition report satisfaction with treatment. At least some of those who sought reversals appear not to have been diagnosed correctly.⁴
- Even though children may exhibit gender dysphoria at an early age, they do not require medical treatment in their early years. They (and their families) only require support and safety as the child moves toward puberty, at which point the use of puberty blockers may be indicated in some cases. These puberty blockers have been used for decades for other conditions. While mental health outcomes for trans patients appear to be favorable,⁵ there is concern about certain side effects, especially reduced bone density.⁶

Theological and Philosophical Issues

Transgender experience goes right to the heart of our understanding of the human person. The overriding cultural view, despite historical evidence to the contrary, is that our sexuality is "binary" – that is, humans only exist as male and female. There are no gray areas, and there is certainly no possibility of being "born in the wrong body" as it is sometimes described.

For Catholics, this view is rooted in both theology and philosophy. A document issued by the *Dicastery for Education* in 2019 called "Male and Female He Created Them," focuses on education and not health care. It invokes both biblical and scientific evidence, affirms the "unity of body and soul" (#32), and rejects gender theory (#19) and "dualistic anthropology" (#20). However, its dialogical tone and call for us to "listen, reason and propose" is quite unusual for a Vatican document.⁷

In the United States the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Doctrine worked for several years on a statement about transgender health. The "Doctrinal Note" that eventually emerged stressed the order of creation and

the inseparability of body and soul.⁸ It says this order requires that technological manipulations of the body are permissible for only two reasons, viz., to repair a defect or when the sacrifice of a part of the body is necessary for the welfare of the whole body.⁹ Any other kind of intervention constitutes mutilation.

Catholic teaching draws not only on biblical witness but also on reasonable assessment of human experience, which we call "natural law." This is the basis of nearly all of our moral teaching, especially on sexuality. This is also a way of saying that Revelation is broader than just Scripture and that we participate in God's plan through reasoned reflection on reality, including our bodies. One biblical scholar says that because of the Incarnation, the body not only *can* reveal God, "it may be the privileged medium of divine self-disclosure."¹⁰ We believe that there is only one truth, and that science and faith cannot come into conflict. Or as St. Augustine says (on the ITEST webpage) "the Book of Nature and the Book of Scripture were written by the same author, and they cannot be in conflict." That means simply that we must take science seriously. If a scientific fact appears to be in conflict with faith or with the Bible, then we have to reassess our doctrinal formulations or our interpretation of Scripture.

We believe that there is only one truth,
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The first author attended a LGBTQ education day at a medical school a few years ago. The sessions provided an overview on everything that physicians might encounter, including trans persons. At the break, one of the medical students came up, in obvious distress, and said she was an evangelical Christian and did not know how to deal with this issue. "None of this is in the Bible," she said. The first author gently suggested that that was the limitation of some forms of religious faith that relied solely on Scripture. The Bible did not cover everything and could not anticipate modern scientific findings like the date of the creation of the earth, human genome, or the existence of transgender persons. Fortunately for us as Catholics, we trust that God's plan is mediated not just through Scripture, but also through experience and even culture.

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Philosophy

The main philosophical question is “What is a human person?” Are we sexually binary, or are there exceptions or variations that are not inconsistent with full personhood? Except for intersex children (those born with some physical characteristics of both sexes) we have had no objective proof to support the claim of trans persons that they experience a painful disparity between their physical sex and their gender and that “they know who they are.” Some philosophers describe this as an unacceptable “body/self” dualism so “that the ‘real’ self is not the body as given but merely the ‘self’ as perceived. The discordance, then, is primarily epistemic in nature.”¹¹

However, if we can establish that gender incongruence is a naturally occurring phenomenon caused by some biological (not psychological-only) factor, then we will have to incorporate that into a broader definition of personhood. This is exactly what scientist and health care ethicists Mark Schwartz and Albert Moraczewski, O.P. suggested in 1983.¹² To date it does not seem that we have such proof, but we may be closer as we gather and assess personal experiences and scientific evidence.

Politics and Transgender Rights

Politicians have made matters worse. They denounce transgender rights as an attempt to relativize everything so that sex and gender become a matter of personal choice. They see this as a threat to family and traditional roles of men and women.

Many states have enacted or proposed legislation that limits funding or access to gender-affirming care and restricts participation in sports for trans minors. This

legislation rejects science in favor of ideology and comes more from politicians’ desire to establish their conservative *bona fides*. It is bad policy and bad medicine.



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Conclusion

There is an old scholastic axiom, “Never deny, seldom affirm, and always distinguish.” Two distinctions are of paramount importance in this debate. First is the distinction between morality, which is private and personal, and public policy, which has the more limited goal of public order. It is not that public policy has no place in medical questions, but rather that politicians need to acknowledge their own limited competence and expertise in these areas. Second, we need to maintain the distinction between various gender ideologies that are based on personal choice, and perhaps even a desire to eliminate gender differences entirely, and clinical conditions like gender dysphoria and incongruence. We need to stick to the science and constantly evaluate it in light of the Gospel and our moral tradition. When scientific certitude warrants it, we need to have the courage to reformulate our moral teachings to reflect that truth. ■

End notes on page 7



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End Notes

¹ Oliver Knight’s hysterectomy was cancelled minutes before surgery at a California hospital, <https://www.nbcnews.com/feature/nbc-out/trans-man-says-catholic-hospital-canceled-hysterectomy-minutes-surgery-n987201>, and also “Hospital Refused to Provide Medically Necessary Surgery Because I am Transgender” (ACLU February 27, 2020), <https://www.aclu.org/news/lgbtq-rights/a-hospital-refused-to-provide-medically-necessary-surgery-because-i-am-transgender>

² World Professional Association for Transgender Health, *Standards of Care Version 8* <https://www.wpath.org/soc8>

³ See Jennifer Gruenke, “Rethinking the Conservative Approach to Transgenderism” for a fuller description of some of the factors that may contribute to gender incongruence. <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2015/07/15377/>

⁴ Keira Bell detransitioned after she realized she had made a bad decision, thinking transition would solve all her problems. See *Persuasion* April 7, 2021 (<https://www.persuasion.community/p/keira-bell-my-story>)

⁵ Jack L. Turban, MD, MHS, Dana King, MLM, et al., “Pubertal Suppression for Transgender Youth and Risk of Suicidal Ideation”, *Pediatrics* (2020) 145 (2): e20191725, <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-1725>

⁶ “2-year treatment with GnRHa may result in bone mass accrual retardation (decrease in BMD/BMAD z-scores), growth velocity deceleration (decrease in height SDS), increase in fat mass, temporary pause in oocyte/sperm maturation.” Grigoria Betsi, Panagiota Goulia, et al., *Frontiers in Endocrinology* (13 June 2024) 15 – 2024, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fendo.2024.1309904>.

See also Taylor J, Mitchell A, Hall R, *et al*, note that there is a lack of “high quality research assessing puberty suppression in adolescents.” “Interventions to Suppress Puberty in Adolescents Experiencing Gender Dysphoria or Incongruence: A Systematic Review,” *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 2024; **109**: s33-s47.

⁷ “Male and Female He Created them: Towards a Path of Dialogue on the Question of Gender Theory in Education,” Vatican City, Congregation for Catholic Education, February 2019.

⁸ “Doctrinal Note on the Moral Limits to Technological Manipulation of the Body,” (Washington, USCCB Committee on Doctrine, 20 March 2023, #3.) The document says “...A crucial aspect of the order of nature created by God is the body-soul unity of each human person.” The document seems to equate gender and soul, which we have reservations about. The soul is the form of the body, but it is not clear that it has the same relationship as gender to physical sex. <https://www.usccb.org/resources/Doctrinal%20Note%202023-03-20.pdf>

⁹ “Doctrinal Note” #8. The document allows removal or alteration of a body part for the sake of the whole *body*, but not for the sake of the whole *person*, which would be necessary in the case of gender incongruence.

¹⁰ See Luke Timothy Johnson *The Revelatory Body: Theology as Inductive Art* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2015), 57. He continues “the testimony of Scripture points away from itself as a sole or sufficient source of revelation about God. The texts of Scripture rather report and point to the revelation of God that takes place outside texts in the world, preeminently through the bodies of human beings” (59).

¹¹ Jason Eberl and Elliot Bedford, “Is the Soul Sexed? Anthropology, Transgenderism, and Disorders of Sex Development,” *Health Care Ethics USA*, Summer 2016, 25. See also their response to a critique by Edward Furton, “Actual Human Persons Are Sexed, Unified Beings,” *Ethics and Medics* 42:10 (Oct 2017): 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.5840/em2017421016>

¹² Albert Moraczewski, OP, “A Reflection on Chapter Ten: Gender Dysphoria, A Theological Note,” From Mark Schwartz and Albert Moraczewski, *Sex and Gender: A Theological and Scientific Inquiry*, (Pope John Center, St. Louis, 1983) 298-319. The authors admit there is a remote possibility that sex and gender are not absolutely connected, and that while removal of tissues and appendages which are seriously threatening to the physical life of the patient can be morally justified, unless “it were shown that indeed there is a discordance between the anatomical sex and gender identity, and further, presuming that the more fundamental of the two – in the sense of being a more intimate part of the individual’s personhood, was a gender identity, then such surgical procedure could be viewed as a corrective measure and then in all probability morally permissible” (303). Eberl and Bedford consider a similar question but do not believe changes caused by hormonal exposure would change the essential nature of the person. ■

Same Sex Attraction and the Wisdom of Courage International

by Fr. Brian Gannon

Human existence begs the most critical question anyone could ask, a question that stumps scientific inquiry and one that only our Catholic faith can answer, but answer magnificently: Why did God make me? The classic catechetical response is: to know Him, to love Him and serve Him in this world, so to be happy with Him in the next. The deepest question is not what makes us happy, but how does God, who designed the human person, lead us to happiness.

The deepest question is not what makes us happy, but how does God, who designed the human person, lead us to happiness.

There is an old joke about commencement speakers. They love to say, “follow your dreams.” But what if your immediate dreams involve criminal activity or exploitation of other human beings? All reasonable people would say your dreams are way off, contrary to true happiness. This reveals at the personal, subjective level the demand for an objective order that would actually filter good and bad dreams. It reveals that happiness is not a subjective reality, but that it utterly depends on God. Thus, while there can be a legitimate subjective nature to worldly happiness (chocolate, vanilla), that is a matter of taste where neither is evil. But the natural moral law, as defined by the commandments, reveals an objective order of good and evil. Vatican II in *Gaudium et Spes* #27 testifies to this as it asserts a list of intrinsically evil acts, including #51 indicating abortion and euthanasia as unspeakable crimes.

As Jesus indicated, if you wish to understand marriage, the first and most core relationship instituted by God, you must go back to the beginning. So, we go back to God’s blueprint and design of the universe. First, man and woman are created on the sixth day. This is critical. In Genesis 1, each act of creation is more ambitious and sophisticated than that of the previous day. Yet, there is one more day of the week: the Sabbath, and as Our Lord says, “the sabbath was made for man.” Worship, of course, means not only physical attendance, but the practice of the moral life as well, which sets the stage for deeper intimacy.

After the Fall, in Genesis 3, God reveals many consequences of sin: primary is the tension between man and woman as expressed to Eve (v. 16). This passage reveals the imbalance going forward between man and woman. But the deeper cause of the disorder is not from without; it is from man severing himself from his relationship with God. Without God, human affection remains, the capacity for relationship remains, but they are without a rudder, without an internal, perfect governance of human energies, the passions, and the grace to nourish them. Thus, they will easily lead to false fulfillments unintended by God - self-destructive ones - and thus not the true happiness that man and woman desire that is only available in God.

This leads us to Courage international, the apostolate founded by the late Fr. John Harvey as an outreach to those who experience same sex attraction. Beginning in 1980 in New York City, Courage was launched as an apostolate of faith, hope, and charity regarding the challenge of so many persons experiencing same sex attraction. It was to remain staunchly Catholic, faithful to the magisterial teaching of the Church. Proverbs 16 tells us: “He who conquers the spirit is better than the one who conquers the city.” This is a powerful message as well as an antidote to the extraordinary “gospel” of self-indulgence and abandonment of Church teaching as promulgated by so many today. The only true path is the conquest of self via grace and Church teaching. Fr. Harvey understood that reality deeply, and he built up Courage to where it has thousands of members and nearly 300 chapters worldwide today. The main thrust of the apostolate remains the same: that happiness is found only in the complete surrender of the soul to Jesus Christ. These local chapters are led by clergy formed to moderate the gathering in the Church’s tradition that all are made in the image of God, that the virtuous life is the actual life of fulfillment, and that Catholic moral teaching, grounded in grace, unlocks the door to that fulfilled life.

Courage consists precisely of men and women who deeply experience a reality that, while seemingly pointing a road to happiness, contradicts God’s teaching. Thus, it begs deeper questions precisely about how my feelings and experience may lead me away from God! I must therefore discover how to navigate

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those human feelings that falsely promise happiness but contradict God who is my true happiness. All human beings experience this! The temptation to sin always promises a fix that is ultimately a mirage. Slugging the bully in the playground for revenge, gossip, lust, pornography, thievery, drug addiction - all are examples of experiencing feelings that can drive us to a solution that while seemingly satisfying, is completely contrary to my good, the good of the community, and the love of God.

St. Thomas Aquinas lists sexual desire as the second most powerful urge in the person, after the will to survive. We also recognize it as fallen. But in the original divine plan, and as especially illustrated in John Paul II's *Theology of the Body*, we see that the visible body is made to express an invisible supernatural reality that is good. That the two become one flesh in marriage is a profound example of this. The fact that it is through the body that the Truth is said, or that the human person worships God, or the person sacrifices their life for another out of love, are all expressions of the invisible: love shared and sought, manifested in physical, visible action of the body. At the same time, sin is expressed in the body as a rebellion against God. It is fascinating that the original sin is an act of eating the forbidden fruit. Eating is a physical way in which we become one with another substance, and man uses a fundamental, good drive of the desire to eat, to manifest an evil rebellion against God. Evil is a choice of the invisible soul manifested in the visible body. Thus, Adam and Eve eating the fruit represents the totality of their willful rebellion.



Therefore, when it comes to the issue of same sex attraction, the first and foremost authority to which we submit is always Almighty God through Holy Mother Church. If we truly believe that Christ is the 2nd person in the Trinity and Savior, then we fully accept His Bride the Church as His voice that teaches us His Word as promised. The Church teaches the two ends of sexual relations: the unitive and the procreative. Both are only possible via the relationship between man and woman in matrimony whose complementary

bodies enable the invisible love and bond of matrimony rendered visible by conjugal relations. But also, conjugal relations must be preceded by the marital vows because the invisible oneness of the supernatural union must precede the conjugal act, otherwise the bodies lie to each other about the lacking invisible reality of the oneness of their relationship.

A powerful witness within Courage members from the realm of human experience is that all the members realize the emptiness of same sex relations; that it leaves them restless; that the serenity of heart, the true integrity of the life lived for God, is the one that leaves them far more satisfied. Hence, in Courage International, one finds an incredibly much higher percentage of daily Mass going, daily Rosary reciting persons than even the average Sunday Catholic church goer. And they will testify how the worship of God and personal prayer are the anchors for which they have always been searching. And this is also a great cross: that they must submit to the truth that they cannot engage in a self-giving sexual relationship with another of their same sex, although that is the urge within them, while seeing men and women in matrimony enjoying such a privilege. Yet, they bear no resentment to God; they only desire to live as He has designed us. They have discovered that their fallen human nature, like every human person, can lie to them about emotional or physical satisfactions of their desires.

Courage men and women become a great beacon to the rest of the world. Their commitment to the faith - their willingness to persevere despite the fragility of their physical nature and the messaging of the world - gives an incredible hope that the timeless prescription of the Bible: fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, remain the constant of the true disciple of Christ and the keys that unlock true mastery of self and authentic love of neighbor.

This then lends itself to so many other areas like gender dysphoria. We begin by remembering you are not defined by what you feel or experience physically or emotionally; you are defined by your supreme gift as an image of God. That is your dignity and thus your priceless worth before God. All flows from there. Pastorally speaking, of course, one must give full ear to the angst and even crisis that people with same sex attraction or gender dysphoria experience, as would our Lord give them a listening ear. By this way of accompaniment, the Christian disciple initiates a friendship of trust, concern, and authentic love for

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that person - a love defined by Aquinas - willing the good (God's wisdom and grace) for the other. That love leads me to bear witness to the teaching of the Church.

But the key here is the human experience. I cannot act on every angry impulse, I cannot act on every depressing impulse, and I cannot act on every sexual impulse. Hence experience means in this essay not momentary impulses, but the long-term consistent urge of my body and mind, which is subject to a fallen human nature. We know that they easily lead us astray. Thus, the same criteria apply to the experience of gender dysphoria. There are only two sexes, as we know. The visible reveals the invisible: an x chromosome and a y chromosome. This is the male and female creation of Genesis now described in scientific terms. Science is manifesting scriptural truth.

This is not to deny the suffering of the dysphoric person. The pain they experience is real and often deep. They must be reassured of their dignity before God, the beloved status they enjoy as His adopted child, the fact that He died for them on the cross, and that God passionately wants them to be in heaven. Importantly, God does not disdain or ever cast them off. The reassurance of love is critical. But the demand for a proper way forward won't disappear. Thus, the critical nature of understanding their experience and suffering via scientific means is helpful, but this is where the template of Courage is helpful. The world says the answer for same sex attraction is to indulge in same sex relations, but we know this can never be the answer. The world tells the gender dysphoric person that surgery, really mutilation of the body, is the answer, but tens of thousands have gravely regretted such surgery only a little while later. Can we accompany them, and through counseling and loving guidance, help them first and foremost find peace with God through the sacraments, Christ's wisdom, and self-mastery? Can we show them that their self-worth is in their relationship with God, and that many times the thought of gender dysphoria is a psychological phenomenon that can be remedied through in-depth counseling, not surgery?

Despite the massive strides of modern science, scientific discovery alone cannot answer the question of what the purpose of life is; it cannot decide what is good and what is evil on its own. That is the mistake of Adam and Eve, and the pride that portends all sin we commit. There is only One who is Good (Mt. 19:17). Scientific discovery can only investigate and

give greater understanding to the physical and emotional drives of the human person. These are indeed important elements for building a Catholic understanding of the human person. But if we are to accept Our Lord as Savior, then all scientific discovery is subordinated to the eternal truths as proclaimed by Holy Mother Church.

But if we are to accept Our Lord as Savior, then all scientific discovery is subordinated to the eternal truths as proclaimed by Holy Mother Church.

As in keeping with Holy Scripture, the relationship between science and faith is a critical one. Because God gives us the ability to understand the universe, to use it for our advantage, human knowledge and progress play a key role in the betterment of life for man and woman. The discovery of new medical treatments, technological devices that save lives, all point to this. However, again, as a famous theologian said, a scientist can analyze the paint ingredients on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, but will not, via such analysis, be able to explain why the ceiling is beautiful, why it inspires people to change their lives. Thus, there must be a prior authority that supersedes scientific discovery in order to explain such dynamics. That authority is Christ the Lord, the God-man who reminds us that what seems to drive us instinctually must be checked by the loving God. The world would never have advised Christ that dying on the cross in the most humiliating fashion would be the greatest victory in world history - that choosing to die, to sacrifice my life instead of choosing immorality, would somehow be to my advantage. Because in the end, something becomes the supreme authority. If not the God of Jesus Christ, through the Church, then it would be scientism, the idea that scientific discovery can make arbitrary and new moral laws - or my ego and desires, which of course is relativism. We see this in the ability to destroy human life, i.e., abortion, euthanasia. The utilitarian ethics of ending suffering through murder or using scientific terms in euphemistic ways to call human life a pile of cells, or a non-contributing parasite that prevents others from worldly happiness, are examples of language that reveal that the user defies convenience, pleasure, and power over sacrifice to God. This is the story of the rise and fall of Israel.

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This then easily becomes the template for evaluating same sex attraction. Though again, it could be the profound urge of a person, it must be guided ultimately not by what scientific advances can do, but by what God teaches about what those advances should do. There is no greater love than that of the Cross, which is emblematic of self-giving, self-sacrifice, and thus demonstrating the ultimate victory over death and unhappiness is the surrender of the soul to Christ, not to feelings or a new technological advance that contradicts moral teaching. Thus, Christ is the locus of human fulfillment, and no one has the authority to change Christ's teaching. To clarify and to deepen understanding are useful tools of the different sciences, but it was not a scientific discovery that brought the stone tablets down from Sinai; it was a prophet chosen by God. Likewise, the Church plays that role as well.

Thus, with theology and the purpose of man and woman, we understand how those physical and emotional drives are meant to be calibrated and directed: to the will of a loving God who died for us. Hence, we die to ourselves. Not through repression, but through rechanneling the passions to the goal that was clear prior to the original sin, to serve God and glorify God, but never to justify rebellion against Him. Rebellion against God is the source of all despair. Self-mastery and reengineering the fallen passions and hu-

man feelings towards the good is not a quaint idea of Catholic spirituality, but in fact, intrinsic to many rehabilitation programs from wrongful addiction. They recognize the critical nature of the mind to confess a fundamental truth about what is good for me and rechannel the latent energies within myself towards that Good. Such rehab remedies are prevalent in many secular programs but are ultimately rooted in the principles clearly set forth in Scripture by Our Lord and His apostles and by the great saints practicing holiness throughout the centuries. As the great St. Teresa of Calcutta demonstrated through her incredible life of profound subordination to God's will, she discovered the joy of self-denial, the joy of sacrifice for God, the joy of mastering self-indulgence and living only for Jesus Christ. ■



Rev. Brian Gannon, STD is a priest of the Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, and effective July 1, 2024, he began his role as Executive Director of Courage International. He remains pastor of St. Theresa parish in Trumbull, Connecticut.

Faith + Science = Well-being

by Christopher Reilly

Great news for ITEST members! A 2024 study¹ by researchers at Brunel University of London found that people who see science and faith as compatible also experience greater well-being, including greater optimism and sense of purpose. The questionnaire was presented to more than 55,000 people in 54 countries. The highest scores for well-being and belief in the compatibility of faith and science were represented among Hindus and Muslims. Unfortunately, various Christian churches were not differentiated in the results. The authors state that “perceived incompatibility prevails chiefly in Western societies, especially among people who are lower in [religious/spiritual] beliefs. This perception, then, is not inevitable in all societies or typical in any global cross-cultural sense.” The authors suggest that the cultural variability of belief in the compatibility of faith and science

is a positive indication of opportunities to educate the public and improve their positive views of science.

I would add that persons who are “lower” in religious beliefs are devoted, at least, to the truth of science on its own. If we can show unbelievers the real contradiction of a truly scientific outlook with religious unbelief, we may spark an era of re-enchantment. ■

Endnote

¹ Michael E. Price and Dominic D. P. Johnson, “Science and Religion around the World: Compatibility between Belief Systems Predicts Increased Well-Being,” *Religion, Brain & Behavior* (August 8, 2024), 1–20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2153599X.2024.2363773>.

New Developments in Genetic Editing and Testing of Unborn Persons

by Christopher Reilly

An article published in *ACS Nano*¹ in October describes successful use of a new tool for blocking the progress of neurodevelopmental conditions in unborn persons at the fetal stage. Although the tests were conducted in mice, there is strong hope that the procedure – which transfected 30% of brain cells – will be used to treat conditions like Angelman and Rett syndromes in humans. The process involves delivering mRNA (messenger RNA) genetic material to brain cells and thereby altering protein formation by the cells. Doing this before the blood-brain barrier is fully formed is a great advantage. Such medical intervention may one day improve lives as well as save them from stillbirth and abortions (which are often in response to pre-natal genetic testing results).



Many researchers continue, however, to emphasize improvement of genetic testing in order to identify, and often discard or freeze (through cryopreservation),

unwanted embryonic persons during IVF procedures. A September article in *Nature Communications*² describes a new technique that quickly and accurately tests and diagnoses the entire genome of an embryo in a single test, which is potentially a much more efficient option than the usual battery of tests. The accuracy of the test may allow for more embryos to be transferred to the mother's uterus, but the intent of such pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) is quite often to eliminate embryos that carry unwanted genetic conditions or traits.

Truly concerning is the arrival of companies like Heliospect Genomics, which – according to *The Guardian*³ and based on undercover recordings – is offering

to analyze up to 100 embryos at a time for their expected level of intelligence. Such “services” likely amount to eugenics, which is the manipulation or elimination of the human gene pool to encourage the birth of persons with preferred traits. Heliospect Genomics is operating in England, but is incorporated in the U.S., where selecting embryos based on IQ is still legal. The Catholic Church has strongly condemned the immorality of eugenics.⁴ ■

Endnotes

¹ Kewa Gao, et al, “Widespread Gene Editing in the Brain via In Utero Delivery of mRNA Using Acid-Degradable Lipid Nanoparticles,” *ACS Nano* 18, 44, 30293–30306 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1021/acsnano.4c05169>.

² Anouk E. J. Janssen, et al, “Clinical-Grade Whole Genome Sequencing-Based Haplarithmisis Enables All Forms of Preimplantation Genetic Testing,” *Nature Communications* 15, 7164 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-024-51508-1>.

³ Hannah Devlin, Tom Burgis, David Pegg, and Jason Wilson, “US Startup Charging Couples to ‘Screen Embryos for IQ’,” *The Guardian* (October 18, 2024), <https://amp.theguardian.com/science/2024/oct/18/us-startup-charging-couples-to-screen-embryos-for-iq>.

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas Personae* “On Certain Bioethical Questions,” (September 8, 2008), 22 and 27. For more information, see Christopher M. Reilly and Jonathan Scrafford, “Prenatal Testing and Diagnosis,” in *Catholic Health Care Ethics: A Manual for Practitioners*, 3rd Ed. (Philadelphia: National Catholic Bioethics Center, 2020), 12.1.

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