



# Medical Ethics Newsletter

## Catholic Medical Students' Association

*Affiliated with the Catholic Medical Association*



### CMSA Goals

- To provide guidance and support for medical students.
- To support & nurture spiritual growth and moral leadership.
- To promote education in Catholic physician values.
- To develop community among students entering the medical professions.

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## THEOLOGY OF THE BODY AND MEDICINE

As medical students we are obviously very interested in the human body. We spend hours studying its structure, the way it moves, how it breaks down, and how it heals. Have you ever considered that we should be just as interested in the body because we are Catholics?

Many of us are planning to attend the Catholic Medical Association's October 4-6 conference "Theology of the Body: The Dignity of Woman." But what makes the body *theological* & what has this to do with medicine?

In a series of 129 catecheses, our beloved Pope John Paul the Great presented to the world an integral vision of the human person which has been dubbed the "Theology of the

Body." In this total vision of man considered as an "embodied person," John Paul II affirms the profound moral and spiritual good of the human body against modernity's instrumental view of it. He teaches that the body "reveals the person" and that "it alone is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine."

For John Paul II, the body-in its manifold actions including its sexual acts-speaks a language that reveals the mystery and meaning of the human person: to image and partake in the Trinitarian God's eternal exchange of love. Through being created male and female, and being called in marriage to unite in "one

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## MAKING THE TRANSITION TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

One of the proudest transitions that can be made in a young person's life is that from "pre-med" to full-fledged medical student. The road to that destination, however, can easily lead a student down an Augustinian "path of sacrilegious curiosity" based solely on the culture the premedical, secular undergraduate education creates. Anyone who has begun the journey in an attempt to gain admission to medical school has undoubtedly experienced the contrasts that exist between re-

maining a good Catholic and a competitive student.

Recently, someone used a great analogy to describe the Culture of Death to me. It is like swimming in a dirty pool, and even when one tries to remove oneself from the pool, the filth still lingers on the body. Premedical students find themselves submerged in this pool and indeed, it becomes difficult to remember that their Christian

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## THEOLOGY OF THE BODY & MEDICINE: Continued...

...flesh,” the human person becomes an icon of God’s total, free, faithful, and fruitful love. God’s invisible mystery is that He is love, and the body supremely reflects this truth in authentic sexual union.

to the point that “sexuality [is] regarded more as an area for manipulation and exploitation than as the basis of that primordial wonder which led Adam on the morning of creation to exclaim before Eve: ‘This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,’” (John Paul II *Letter to Families* 19). We are servants of this truth, of this primordial wonder. We must become fluent in the language of the body. Contraception, *in vitro* fertilization, these words are not in the body’s vocabulary, for the language of the body is gift.

*The Hippocratic Oath is the best summary of medical ethics thus far articulated.*

God’s plan for us is to joyfully live this “nuptial meaning” of the human body. For as the Second Vatican Council taught in *Gaudium et Spes*, “man, who is the only creature on earth which God willed for itself, cannot fully find himself except through a sincere gift of self.” (GS, 24) In giving oneself bodily to another in marriage, a human person discovers the purpose of his or her life. The self-gift of the priest or religious does this too, but in a different way.

The theology of the body is important to Catholic medical professionals because many of us will be entrusted with the care of human life, the sexual function of patients, and the fertility of couples. Accordingly, we must stand against whatever counterfeits true medicine and help our patients learn the language of the body.

*A tradition which should be exemplified by every physician.*

### ***But why should a Catholic medical professional be concerned with a theology of the body?***

The culture-and even our profession-has divorced the body from its purpose

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## MAKING THE TRANSITION TO MEDICAL SCHOOL: Continued...

Identity and faith, as C. S. Lewis pointed out, is of “infinite importance.” It becomes of paramount significance for Catholic premeds to remember that it is important to do well, but it is only with God’s Grace that they do so. They need to take heart in the Lord’s message to love their neighbor, even when that neighbor happens to do things that may be difficult for the Catholic student to accept. Catholic premeds need to study well genetics, evolution, and biochemical pathways, but keep the understanding that the wonder of the earth was created only through God’s infinite wisdom. A good Catholic premed will un-

derstand that the diversity of people was created by God and is good, but that willfully engaging in objective moral evil actions is wrong.

Bearing these things in mind, the Catholic premed who makes it through the undergraduate career and through medical school will have built a firm foundation from which he or she will be able to practice medicine in a manner true and faithful to the teachings of the Catholic Church.

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## THE SACRAMENT OF THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK

As a medical student, you may at one time or another encounter a priest performing the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick for a patient, or maybe someday you might have the chance to request a priest to administer this Sacrament to one of your patients. Unlike the other sacraments such as the Eucharist or Reconciliation, Anointing of the Sick is not as frequently experienced by an ordinary Catholic. Here's a brief explanation of the Sacrament so you may better understand and appreciate it. Most of the answers are quoted from the Catechism of the Catholic Church [CCC] and the Code of Canon Law [CL].

### *How is Anointing of the Sick a sacrament?*

Tradition has recognized in this rite one of the seven sacraments. [CCC, 1510] Additionally, this sacred anointing of the sick was instituted by Christ our Lord as a true and proper sacrament of the New Testament. It is alluded to indeed by Mark, but is recommended to the faithful and promulgated by James the apostle. [CCC, par. 1511] Mark 6:13: "And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many that were sick and healed them." This verse is in reference to the Twelve Apostles whom Jesus had commissioned early in his ministry. James 5:14-15 is often quoted regarding the practice of anointing the sick: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer of the faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven."



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### *Who can minister the Sacrament?*

Only a priest can validly administer the Sacrament [CL 1003]. However, deacons and non-ordained pastoral workers can use blessed oil in praying for and blessing the sick—in this case, this act is a sacramental and not the Sacrament.

### *Who can receive the Sacrament?*

"The anointing of the sick can be administered to any member of the faithful who, having reached the use of reason, begins to be in danger by reason of illness or old age," [CL 1004]. Hence, it is given to those who are validly baptized, have attained the use of reason, and are seriously impaired because of old age or illness. A person who once had the use of reason and subsequently lost it can validly receive anointing of the sick, for example patients with Alzheimer disease. Other examples include those who are about to undergo surgery, and elderly people who become notably weakened even though no serious illness is present.

### *Can the Sacrament ever not be given to someone who asks for it?*

Canon Law gives conditions for administering the sacrament. If a patient asks for Anointing of the Sick, it is best to refer the patient to a priest and allow them confidential time and space to talk about this sacrament and others which may be beneficial for the patient.

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*Serving God and man*

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ON THE WEB AT  
[WWW.CATHMSA.ORG](http://WWW.CATHMSA.ORG)

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## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **2007 ANNUAL WHITE MASS** *IN HONOR OF ST. LUKE*

HOLY NAME CATHEDRAL  
October 21, 2007 at 11:00 AM  
State & Superior Streets, Chicago, IL

Celebrant: Bishop Thomas Paprocki

Brunch to follow (\$25.00)  
Medical & Dental Students & Children FREE!  
Please RSVP to: [info@cathmsa.org](mailto:info@cathmsa.org)

### **CATHOLIC MEDICAL ASSOCIATION**

76th Annual National Conference:  
"Theology of the Body: The Dignity of Woman"  
October 4-6, 2007 in *Atlanta, Georgia*

Scholarships for medical students are available through the CMA. The deadline for the application is September 14, 2007.

For more information or to register online visit:  
[WWW.CATHMED.ORG](http://WWW.CATHMED.ORG)

Address Label Here

### **NEW MEMBERS**

We encourage Students to join the Catholic Medical Association.  
For Registration & Membership Information,  
Call 1-215-877-9099 or visit [WWW.CATHMED.ORG](http://WWW.CATHMED.ORG)