In This Issue

This issue opens with an essay by Malcolm Byrnes reflecting on the disappointment that many feel concerning President Barak Obama's recent decision to provide taxpayer funding for embryonic stem cell research. In "Confessions of a 'Pro-Life' Obama Supporter," Byrnes notes that the decision, though not unexpected, will likely lead to several undesirable consequences, including the production of excessive embryos in fertility clinics for the purpose of research, the commodification of embryonic human life, and the exploitation of fertile women. He expresses his hope for stronger moral leadership from the President in the future.

In "Presumed Consent for Organ Donation," Rev. Nicanor Austriaco, O.P., argues that the European model of assuming that citizens want to be organ donors violates the principle of informed consent. Catholics and Catholic health care facilities should refuse to participate in any system of presumed consent, should it be enacted into law. This refusal is necessary to ensure that the dignity of the body is respected even in death and that a donation is properly a gift and not simply a taking by the state. The idea of "mandated choice" appears workable, as it conforms to the Catholic standards of informed consent. The wishes of those who agree to donate organs after their death, even if compelled by law to decide yes or no, should be respected.

Did Pope Pius XII and Pope John Paul II contradict each other on whether it is permissible to receive financial compensation for organ donation? Rev. John I. Fleming clears up a confusion in "Is Trade in Body Parts Intrinsically Wrong?" He reviews the major religious attitudes toward the dead body, observing that the Judeo-Christian tradition stands in accord with the general human instinct to protect the human body after death. Financial incentives, Fleming points out, are designed to overcome this intuition. After concluding that commercial exchange is intrinsically wrong, he explores the fine line between justifiable reimbursement and trade in body parts.

William F. Murphy Jr. continues our ongoing debate over the merits of the work of Rev. Martin Rhonheimer, responding to the critique of Steven Long in "The False

Theory undergirding Condomistic Exceptionalism" in the Winter 2008 issue. In "Thomistic Action Theory Revisited," Murphy seeks to show that Long's emphasis on the immediate moral normativity of nature lacks a sufficient orientation to reason and is therefore in danger of the error of physicalism or biologism, that is, the view that one can directly read the moral law off the face of nature. Does moral judgment take its principal bearings from natural teleology? Or is that the work of reason?

Carolyn A. Laabs, in "What Does Justice Say about Euthanasia?" examines the place of the social virtue of justice in the effort to advance euthanasia in the nursing and medical professions. Laabs reviews the central argumentative themes offered by the proponents and shows that they fail to conform to the fundamental principles of justice that have guided health care from the earliest ages. She reviews the contemporary arguments grounded in liberty rights, maximal utility, and fairness, and shows how each conflicts with the fundamental goods of nursing and health care. The communitarian and virtue-based view of justice speaks against abandoning the patient to the lure of euthanasia and emphasizes instead solidarity with the suffering through acts of charity. This view is in keeping with the Hippocratic tradition.

One of the most difficult and challenging areas of contemporary Church teaching concerns the provision of food and water to patients at the end of life. Alan Sanders looks at the question from the hospital setting and examines many of the practical challenges that doctors and nurses face in providing assisted nutrition and hydration (ANH). After discussing the problem of properly interpreting the phrase "terminal illness," he examines three views advanced in public discussions: that ANH reduces the chances of aspiration pneumonia; that ANH will improve nutritional status and the prospect of prolonging life; and that ANH will alleviate the distress caused by hunger and thirst. Although acknowledging the challenges of properly assessing each of these claims, Sanders generally disputes them all. His primary concern is that we not inadvertently harm patients whom we hope to help by imposing on them measures that are not in fact beneficial.

In "The Catholic Physician and Natural Family Planning," Richard J. Fehring, R.N., reviews the Church's support for natural family planning; examines the state of support for NFP within Catholic health care facilities; and discusses the research challenges, educational opportunities, and prospects of NFP for the future. Under the first heading, Fehring recounts the development of magisterial teaching on NFP from the time of Pius XI, through Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae* and the strong support of John Paul II. The low rate of practice of NFP among Catholics is noted, along with a similar lack of knowledge among health care professionals, Catholic and non-Catholic alike. This leads Fehring to recommend the spread of educational programs in the various methods of NFP. Studies examining the effectiveness of NFP are also needed, especially randomized clinical trials. Although there are few researchers in this area, good studies are being done and new devices for detecting fertility have been devised. More research, education, and sound family planning services will be needed in the future.

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