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## Genetics

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that support and encourage life," he said in his Nov. 10 speech. Collins related a story of a woman whose mother was dying from metastatic breast cancer and whose aunt had died from ovarian cancer. For 15 years, the woman worried that she would be next to develop the disease and ultimately decided to have a preventative mastectomy. Just three days before the operation, researchers told her — based on newly available testing for a certain gene — that her risk of developing breast cancer was no greater than that of the general population.

Scientists have seen, and foresee, a range of moral and ethical dilemmas, including:

- A certain gene suppresses several kinds of cancer. A man learns that he carries a mutation in this gene, and his body's cancer-fighting mechanisms are impaired. Should he warn his children that they, too, might face higher-than-average chances of developing cancer? Should he increase his life insurance because of his condition? If his insurance company learns of the mutation, will it raise his premium or cancel his policies altogether?

- A woman, 30, is diagnosed as having familial polyposis — a genetic condition that greatly increases her risk of colon cancer and early death. The woman's children and siblings could be at risk as well. If she refuses to tell family members, should her genetic counselor do so?

Legal questions arise as well. According to surveys published in *Science* magazine and other sources, some individuals have been denied insurance and employment because they carry genes for disease.

While 5 percent of the Human Genome Project's budget goes to "ELSI" — its Ethical, Legal, and Social Implications consortium, that group itself has conflicting opinions and has yet to agree on guidelines for genetic testing.

In April the consortium is expected to come up with its first policy recommendations, based on studies projecting what would happen when testing for cystic fibrosis becomes available.

Last year, meanwhile, the U.S. bishops issued the pamphlet "Critical Decisions: Genetic Testing and Its Implications," which discussed both benefits and potential concerns of genetic testing in the context of existing church teachings. By this summer a follow-up publication, "The Promise and Peril of Genetic Screening," is expected to address such concerns as privacy and potential discrimination by insurers and employers, and suggest guidelines for dealing with various genetic defects.

"The purpose of the whole series (of statements on science and religion) is to place emerging scientific advances and emerging technologies in light of Catholic moral teaching," said David Byers, executive director for the bishops' science committee.

"The church has been one of the major providers of health care for centuries," he noted in an interview with the *Courier*, "so it does applaud anything that is a medical advance."

But Byers added that such advances should not violate moral law. Pope John Paul II called present-day genetic discoveries "marvelous," in addressing the Pon-

tifical Academy for Life in November 1995. Yet he added that research "must also qualify positively from the ethical point of view," and this presupposes that from the outset it endeavors to promote the true good of human beings ..."

That comment echoed earlier church statements. In 1987, the Vatican's "Instruction on Respect for Human Life in Its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation" stated that science and technology "must be at the service of the human person ... according to the design and will of God."

In particular, the Vatican document warned, "Certain attempts to influence chromosomal or genetic inheritance are not therapeutic, but are aimed at producing human beings selected according to sex or other predetermined qualities. These manipulations are contrary to the personal dignity of the human being and his or her integrity and identity."

Pope John Paul II wrote in *Evangelium Vitae* ("The Gospel of Life") that prenatal diagnostic techniques are permissible "when they do not involve disproportionate risks for the child and the mother, and are meant to make possible early therapy or even to favor a serene and informed acceptance of the child not yet born."

These documents, especially the speeches of Pope John Paul II, provide Catholics with a wonderful foundation for considering genetic questions, according to Bishop William Friend of Shreveport, La. He referred to such writings as the church's new catechism, the 1987 document *Donum Vitae* by the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith; and the Vatican II text *Gaudium et Spes*.

Bishop Friend, a member of the Pontifical Council of Culture who also has served as a consultant to the Pontifical Academy of Science and as head of the bishops' science committee, told the *Courier* that the church is keeping pace with genetic research and that scientists are becoming more sensitive to the implications of their work.

But church teachings need to be made available to and understood by parishioners, and parishes should make well-informed people available to provide counseling, he said. Genetic information also has a place in premarriage education, he and others stressed.

"We can fit it in without making a big deal out of it," Bishop Friend said. "There will be people who are afraid of all the monsters and who make an issue out of it. But I find when that occurs they don't have factual information about it."

"The main thing is to avert misconceptions and unwarranted anxiety and fear about the transmission of traits," said Bishop R. Pierre DuMaine of San Jose, Calif., said in a brief interview with the *Courier*. He noted during the bishops' fall meeting that the church should be training priests and others about genetic advances and their pastoral implications.

Bishop Friend and several people interviewed also are concerned about a shortage of genetic counselors — only about 1,000 in the United States and most of them trained to present information and options in a morally neutral way.

"The value-free counseling approach perhaps is going to wane, because it isn't effective in cases like this that involve serious implications for life," Bishop Friend said. "I think that method of counseling needs to be evaluated."

So whom can people turn to for per-

sonal genetic counseling within a moral context?

In the Rochester area, patients usually are referred to the University of Rochester for counseling on challenging genetic issues. Dr. Peter Rowley, chairman of UR's division of genetics, told the *Courier* he encourages individuals to look to their own faiths as well. He has spoken about the subject at his church, St. Paul's Episcopal, and gave a course on ethical issues in genetics at St. Bernard's Institute about two years ago.

"As more genes are discovered, more tests are possible," he said, and more choices will be offered. In fact, he participated in ELSI's first study about the consequences of such choices. "I stress that people learn as much as they can and develop their own value system."

Father Baumiller, too, takes calls. And he meets with people from various dioceses who are struggling with genetic quandaries. He has spoken with women seeking information ranging from predictions of their baby's eye color to questions about Down's syndrome and much more severe conditions. The priest said he takes all questions seriously, noting they may indicate trouble at home. "Even things that seem foolish may have a background of something eating at someone," he remarked.

A former student of Father Baumiller's, Carmelite Father Mathew Temple, chairman of Nazareth College's biology department, also is urging that the church, given its authority and position in the health-care industry, effect a wise use of genetic information. He spoke on a panel with Bishops Friend and DuMaine at the fall NCCB meeting.

The geneticist is pleased that the church is placing genetics in context and "nestles it in the broader framework of human biology." While the research should bring about dramatic change, he compared it to such advances as surgery that society and the church have accepted and welcomed.

And church writings on bioethics, he said, present powerful social-justice statements — emphasizing that the knowledge being gained not be used to subjugate people.

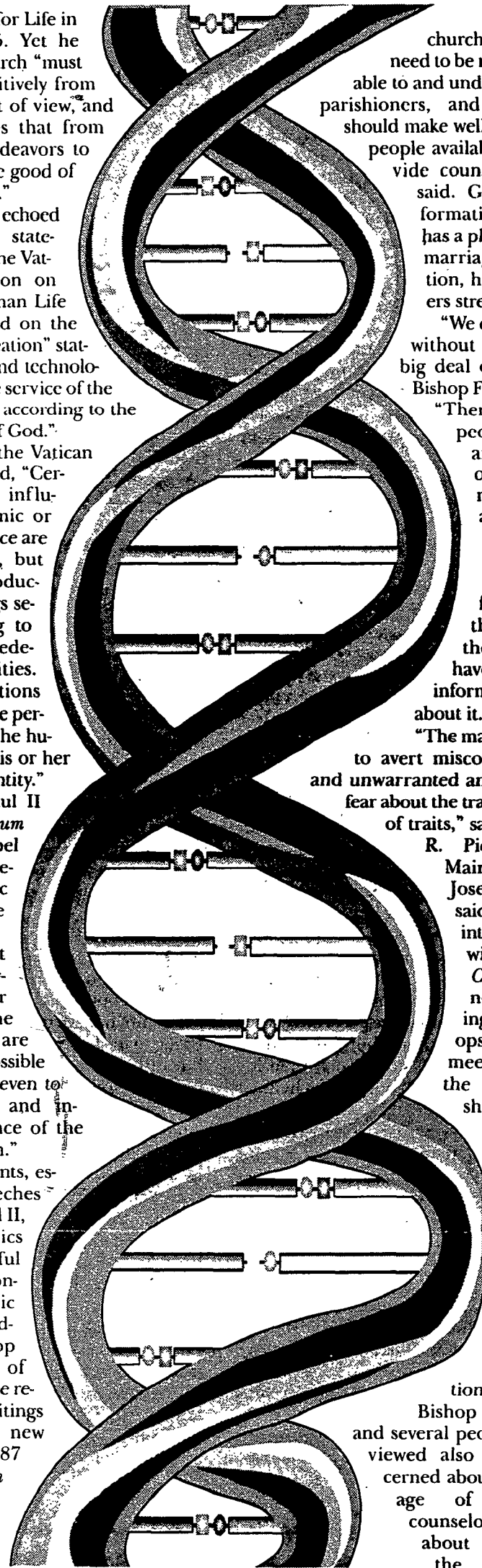
Also, Father Temple noted, "You poke far enough in the human genome and you find everybody carries all kinds of genetic disorders. ... Ultimately it probably is going to have an equalizing effect."

Scientists have estimated that each person carries up to 20 genes that put the person at risk for something.

"My short-term concern," he continued, "is if somebody has a gene (discovered) and a clear prognosis, you make adequate provision for medical care rather than stigmatize them."

Advances in genetic research also may provide increased impetus for the bishops' promotion of social justice and an end to racism.

"The Human Genome Project should be able to establish a distinctive human genetic signature that's as true for some aboriginal in Australia as it is for some Wall Street investment banker. That's an unappreciated outcome," Father Temple said. "I think what we'll come out with when we finally exhaust the gene map is, in a sense, a molecular proclamation: Hey, we all have the same last name here."



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## Father Emo pleads guilty; sentencing pending

Father Eugene Emo pleaded guilty to one count of first-degree sexual abuse in Steuben County Court Feb. 11, and will be sentenced April 28.

By pleading guilty to the class D violent felony charge, he satisfied the "various charges set forth in the indictment," according to a press release from the court.

Father Emo was released pending sentencing. Possible sentences range from conditional discharge to 2-1/3 to

seven years in prison.

"We are relieved that this action precludes the added pain a trial would bring," a Feb. 13 diocesan press release stated. "For the sake of the victim, those for whom such cases resurface painful issues, and the wider community, we pray that this development will offer some measure of healing."

The priest was arrested Feb. 16, 1996, and charged with having sexual contact

with a male in his 30s who was mentally handicapped. According to the court statement, he acknowledged having forcibly subjected another person to sexual contact in late January 1996 at his residence in Cohocton.

Father Emo had been indicted by a Steuben County grand jury Sept. 18 on six felony and two misdemeanor charges. The diocesan priest has been on administrative leave since Jan. 31, 1996.

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