

Applied Science Speaks to Faith

Rethinking human purpose in a post-modern/pro-science culture

Introduction

Welcome to the post-modern/pro-science culture we live in

Two decades into the 21st Century, people in traditionally Western nations find themselves living in what we are calling a *post-modern/pro-science* culture. Seismic changes in philosophy, politics, culture, and religion began with the Enlightenment and have evolved into the post-modern, therapeutic “self” that now dominates all spheres of life. This is perhaps most evident in the evolving transgender movement where an individual’s self-perception can be accepted as more real and true than the “gender assigned at birth.” Thus, a flourishing life has become one in which individual feelings are the primary arbiter of happiness.

The same cultural forces have steadily and inexorably been releasing individuals and societies from an obligation to any transcendent order or moral anchor. Coupled with the astonishing pace of disruptive and innovative advances in science and technology in recent decades, we find our common understanding of what it means to be human stretched and challenged. The implicit trust often placed in science’s empirical approach can best be summed up in a now familiar phrase: “follow the science.”

This is the culture the Church inhabits – and the culture that has, to a significant degree, influenced it. There is no way to turn back the clock to some idealized time when society shared a broadly common ethos about life and God. The Church’s challenge, as ever, is how to be leaven and salt – “in the world but not of it.”

Following the science, particularly in five key areas where advanced technology is dramatically transforming our current and future lives, brings us to profound and disquieting questions about what it means to be a human person created in the image of God. What does the “abundant life” that Jesus promised look like today and tomorrow? How shall we live and serve in God’s kingdom?

These are questions that Church leaders and Christian academics are uniquely positioned and obligated to address. Their perspectives can bring fresh insight and application into the Church – equipping believers to understand the theological implications of science and technological advances. Including Christian voices in the conversation is the only way to ensure that the meaning and purpose of scientific progress can be informed by Judeo-Christian values.

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The Podcast: *What it is*

The goal of the inaugural *Applied Science Speaks to Faith* podcast series is to explore five distinct areas of science and technology through ten conversations with Christian researchers, scientists, and academics who are recognized experts in those areas.

Research and progress in each of these areas often intersect and impact the other areas, creating synergies that drive further discoveries and greater advancements in thinking and application. For example, the recent success in decoding a virtually full human genome was enabled by advances in computing technology.

The broad science and technology areas – and the general topics that could be explored in each – are listed below. As we identify experts in specific areas of research and application, the podcasts will reflect those particular areas of expertise.

1. **Information Science and Technology** – the ubiquitous use and growth of traditional computing and related technology; emergence and impact of quantum computing; limitless data storage and management; advances in data communications that enable virtual and augmented reality, instant communications, pervasive intelligence and the Internet of Things.
2. **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** – intelligence demonstrated by machines; how AI emulates a neural network, learns, and develops; Deep Learning and the related technologies of Machine Learning and Computer Vision; AI's power and limitations. The application of AI to areas of life as diverse as social media and scientific research.
3. **Bioengineering** – the design and construction of new biological entities such as enzymes, genetic proteins, and cells, or the redesign of existing biological systems; genome sequencing; DNA editing; its potential use in the development of both medical therapies and means to transition and/or destroy life.
4. **Robotics** – machines that replicate human actions to improve efficiency and reduce human error; the current and future use of robotics in virtually every realm of human endeavor: industrial, agricultural, military, entertainment, transportation, construction, medicine, household, etc.
5. **International Security/Personal Privacy** – advancements in and purposes for data collection and security in the personal, U.S. domestic, and global realms; integrating and weaponizing information science, AI, synthetic biology, and robotics technologies; the role of government and private sector entities in data collection, protection, and use; the complexity of diplomatic negotiations in a world of secret AI and bioweapons.

These five science and technology areas are not science fiction. Work in each area may still be in its infancy but, in each of them, work is already well-underway and has already profoundly shaped our current world. This is not an all-inclusive list of the areas where science and technology are impacting the culture.

We think these are the key areas where current impact and future advances have the greatest potential to fundamentally redefine and transform our once-shared meaning of reality and, as a result, our understanding of God and His purposes. For this reason, we will focus the inaugural *Science Speaks to Faith* podcasts in these topic areas, with a commitment to explore others that may emerge and enrich the discussion.

As noted earlier, each of these topics also generates many complex issues, with significant areas of intersection and overlap in application. We can already identify some of the impacts on the culture from current applications. We also can anticipate that ongoing research and achievements in the identified areas will rapidly progress and continue to permeate and influence the culture.

Some of the most forward-looking research faces hurdles and a path forward with potential outcomes that cannot be clearly identified at this time. We do not minimize this future-focused work but recognize that it is either highly theoretical or often appears to lack any real-life application. Thus, in the inaugural session of *Applied Science Speaks to Faith*, we will focus on understanding those projects *already underway* that will change our culture and challenge our understanding of reality, humanity, and our divine purpose.

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The Podcast: *Why it matters*

One of the most significant ways a society understands its culture and reality is through its philosophy and, for Christians, its theology. The *Applied Science Speaks to Faith* discussions matter because Christian leaders and academics need a deeper awareness and understanding about how and why science and technology are transforming society and culture. Science is creating these technologies with an unprecedented rate of change; the Church must equip Christians to understand the new reality being created.

While the Church had a role in promoting Enlightenment ideals, the modern thinking that built on those ideals ultimately rejected the idea of sacred truth. Modernism swept through society and culture with largely ineffective objection from the Church; this has diminished the Church's ability to speak with a relevant voice into the current culture. In the same way, the pro-science movement will fundamentally change human life. The Church cannot exist unconcerned or silent, neither by ignorance nor by choice.

Applied Science Speaks to Faith has the potential to be a prophetic call to church leaders and Christian academics. It will raise the issues in a responsible manner that challenges Christian leaders, philosophers, and theologians to better understand and assess the science-driven changes that are ever-emerging in our culture and churches. It will motivate them to work through, discuss, and write about the culture in ways that will influence the Church locally and globally. Our highest goal is that listeners would become inspired and engaged anew in discovering what it means for men and women to live as redeemed sons and daughters of God, committed to advancing His Kingdom in the post-modern/pro-science reality that continues to emerge.

Applied Science Speaks to Faith* Podcast

The guests and the format

Podcast guests will be recognized experts in their fields of study who subscribe to an orthodox Judeo-Christian world view. In each conversation, the discussion will address the following:

1. **Explanation** of the science/technology/research, etc.
2. **Key operators** in the space (i.e. government, private sector) and their accountability
3. **Values** that underpin the science/technology/research, etc. (moral, ethical, monetary, etc.)
4. **Benefits** of the science/technology/research to society, culture, and the common good.
5. **Perils** of the science/technology/research to society, culture, and the common good.

The goal of our discussions with experts in the chosen fields will be to seek information that can illuminate the theological implications of living in a post-modern/pro-science world. *Applied Science Speaks to Faith* will **not** seek to instill fear, nor will it try to suggest that the inevitable future can somehow be slowed or stopped. The goal is to enrich Christian thought leaders with quality information and insight.

This knowledge will inform how they address and answer questions about our understanding of God, human dignity, human flourishing, sin, personal freedom, and many other related topics. And it will enable them to thoughtfully consider these issues **now**. Before science once again outpaces the opportunity to propose a moral and ethical framework that supports the common good. Before God is displaced with the alternative "flourishing" life promised by science and technology.

Applied Science Speaks to Faith is proposed with a great hope the Church can be prepared to bring its voice to the discussion and offer a true and transcendent perspective, both to believers and those who will be seeking a deeper meaning to life than what science offers.

*The development and production of *Applied Science Speaks to Faith* is a product of *Living on the Edge* (<https://livingontheedge.org/>). *Living on the Edge* is a global broadcast/podcast ministry that reaches over 1 million listeners per week. In addition, *Living on the Edge* extensively publishes Christian resources supporting Small Groups and Christian Discipleship.

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