

Editorial: Life science

The pro-life movement is emphasizing a new angle for this year's March for Life in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 18. The event that regularly brings tens of thousands of people together to oppose legal abortion in the United States has chosen the theme: "Unique From Day One."

The rationale behind this choice is to emphasize not a religious truth, such as the sacredness of all human life, or even a moral value, such as nonviolence. Instead, the March for Life, which marks the devastating Jan. 22, 1973, *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision, is emphasizing a scientific reality.

"Being pro-life is not in opposition to science. It's quite the opposite in fact! Medical and technological advancements continue to reaffirm the science behind the pro-life cause," the March for Life's website attests. "From the moment of fertilization, our DNA is present, whether it's 23 pairs of chromosomes or 22."

The march's organizers could be taking a page from the Pope Francis playbook here. Before he was elected pope, then-Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio, S.J., engaged his rabbi friend, Abraham Skorka, in a book-length dialogue, published as "On Heaven and Earth" (Image, \$22). In this book, the future pope used a scientific argument when the topic at hand was abortion:

"The moral problem of abortion is pre-religious in nature because the genetic code of the person happens in the moment of conception. A human being is already there," Cardinal Bergoglio said. "I separate the topic of abortion from any religious concept. It is a scientific problem. To not let the development continue of a being who already has all the genetic code of a human being is not ethical. The right to

life is the first of human rights. To abort is to kill someone who cannot defend himself.”

This argument has surprising strength. He uses only genetics and human rights to build an unassailable pro-life case: It’s wrong to kill a defenseless person. March for Life organizers are emphasizing the same point this year. Focusing on science is a missionary move on the part of the pro-life movement. It suggests a desire to take its appeal into terrain where people don’t agree, to reach those who might not share the Catholic, or any, faith, but who may embrace a scientific argument.

“... [S]cience is on the side of life. When life begins and the stages of prenatal development are scientific facts,” March for Life organizers say on the website. “Humanity – and our uniqueness as individuals – begins at day one, at fertilization. Life, in its most vulnerable form, should be protected. That, in essence, is why we march. We march to end abortion, with the vision of a world where the beauty, dignity, and uniqueness of every human life are valued and protected.”

Such an argument can only strengthen the effort of the pro-life movement. Of course, for the Catholic Church, the compatibility of faith and science is not a revolutionary idea. The teaching and tradition of the Church has always insisted that faith and reason are wholly compatible, even inseparable.

“There is thus no reason for competition of any kind between reason and faith: Each contains the other, and each has its own scope for action,” Pope St. John Paul II wrote in his 1998 encyclical *Fides et Ratio* (“Faith and Reason”).

It is our prayer that emphasizing the connection between science and the pro-life movement will help change hearts and minds in the abortion debate, and will bring a deeper understanding that being pro-life is being pro-science – and

that to be truly pro-science requires being pro-life.

OSV Editorial Board: Don Clemmer, Gretchen R. Crowe, Scott Richert, York Young