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## *"I'm Going to Follow the Science"*

**An article for the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Rev. Sam Candler**

Yes, of course.

I have heard that line over and over now, as most of you reading this article have heard it, again and again. "I'm going to follow the science," as if that statement explains every position they try to justify. It doesn't.

This week, I heard that line from an exceptionally bright and committed person. I was attending my local Atlanta Rotary meeting (via Zoom!), and the guest speaker for the day was none other than Dr. Rochelle Walensky. Yes, that Rochelle Walensky, who is the director of The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. I am one of those who has appreciated her devoted work and service during this historic and challenging time.

But here was her full comment: "Many people say, 'I'm going to follow the science,' as if science is black-and-white. But it is not. Science has a lot of gray." Said Dr. Rochelle Walensky.

I fully agree! I am a person who loves science, appreciates science, believes science, because it is a long-term practice of paying attention, observing empirical data, drawing careful conclusions, and being willing and able to change my mind. I have often considered that science is the art of paying attention, sort of like prayer that way. (I recently heard a noted local radio host, whom I admire, call himself a "political scientist" – which is to say he pays attention to politics!)

I love science because it has a lot of gray. Obviously, there are plenty of certain principles that we do well to accept and live by. But, there is always a lot of gray. That "gray" can be the delightful mystery which inspires us to learn more; that "gray" can be of the Spirit!

Walensky went on to say the real issues are where science meets policy. I agreed even further! Those are the decisions which require far more sensitivity and context than the rather simplistic statement of "I'm going to follow the science." Context and local environments matter.

Regarding pandemic protocols, many of us have agreed and disagreed, just like scientists. Some issues are gray. Of course, some are not. I hope, for instance, and continue to hope, that people everywhere follow the scientifically established benefits of being vaccinated. Vaccinations have saved lives from polio, malaria, typhoid fever, covid-19, and so many other diseases. I submit to vaccinations willingly and eagerly.

But I do not as eagerly say, "I'm going to follow the science," trying to justify so many things, such as why I wear a mask in some places but not in other places. Most of what we do, responsibly, is about observing data, about loving relationships, about weighing risk and reward, and about appreciating that every good thing – every good thing—carries some risk. Times and context change; and our scientific observations and conclusions change, too.

The statement, "I'm going to follow the science," reminds me very much of the statement I have heard even more often in my life, "I'm going to follow the bible." "Sure," I say, "and which part of the bible do you specifically intend to follow?" I try to follow the bible, too, but not every individual part of it. Some parts of the bible are far more important than other parts. I simply do not agree with some of the parts that the fundamentalists emphasize. (Science, too, has its fundamentalists!)

If you have truly read the bible, you may know that claiming "I'm going to follow the bible," does not settle much

at all. You will need some reason with it; you will need some tradition with it; you will need some context with it; you will need some experience with it; you will need some time with it.

Obviously, you will need the guidance of the Spirit with your following of the bible. And it's the same with science. The practice and empirical data of science delivers a lot; but humanity will always need the guidance of Spirit. We need Spirit with our data. We need Spirit with our flesh. We need Spirit with our science! Sure, I am going to follow the science; but I am also going to follow the Spirit!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sam Candler". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

The Very Reverend Samuel G. Candler  
Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip