

# St. Bernadette Respect Life Committee

## Newsletter

April 2006

### THE VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE

Human life is the basis of all goods. Most people regard life as something sacred and hold that no one may dispose of it at will. Catholics see in life something greater, namely, a gift of God's love, which they are called upon to preserve.

No one can make an attempt on the life of an innocent person without opposing God's love for that person, and therefore without committing a grave crime.

Everyone has the duty to lead his life in accordance with God's plan. Life is entrusted to the individual as a good that must bear fruit, and it finds its full perfection only in eternal life.

### STEM CELL RESEARCH AND HUMAN CLONING (USCCB 2004)

#### WHAT IS A STEM CELL?

A stem cell is a relatively unspecialized cell that can do two things: It can make another cell like itself, or make any of a number of cells with more specialized functions.

#### IS THE CATHOLIC CHURCH OPPOSED TO ALL STEM CELL RESEARCH?

Not at all. Most stem cell research uses cells obtained from adult tissue, umbilical cord blood, and other sources that pose no moral problem. Useful stem cells have been found in bone marrow, blood, muscle, fat, nerves, and even in the pulp of baby teeth. Some of these cells are already being used to treat people with a wide variety of diseases.

#### WHY IS THE CHURCH OPPOSED TO STEM CELL RESEARCH USING THE EMBRYO?

Harvesting these stem cells kills the living human embryo. The Church opposes the direct destruction of innocent human life for any purpose, including research.

#### IS THE CHURCH TELLING US TO CHOOSE THE LIVES OF EMBRYOS OVER THE LIVES OF SUFFERING PATIENTS?

No. It is calling us to respect both, without discrimination. We must help those who are suffering, but we may not

use a good end to justify an evil means. The choice is not between science and ethics, but between science that is ethically responsible and science that is not. We cannot save one life by killing another innocent life.

#### IF SOME HUMAN EMBRYOS WILL REMAIN IN FROZEN STORAGE AND ULTIMATELY BE DISCARDED ANYWAY, WHY IS IT WRONG TO TRY TO GET SOME GOOD OUT OF THEM?

In the end we will all die anyway, but that gives no one a right to kill us. These embryos would not die because they are inherently unable to survive. They would die because others are choosing to hand them over for destructive research. The idea of experimenting on human beings because they may die anyway also poses a grave threat to terminally ill patients, and the disabled.

#### WHAT IS HUMAN CLONING AND HOW IS IT RELATED TO STEM CELL RESEARCH?

In human cloning, the DNA from the nucleus of a person's body cell is inserted into an egg whose own genetic material has been removed, and the egg is then stimulated to begin embryonic development. Human cloning is done to create an embryo that will be destroyed to provide stem cells genetically matched to a patient.

#### WHY DOES THE CHURCH OPPOSE HUMAN CLONING?

Cloning is a depersonalized way to reproduce human beings, who are manufactured in the laboratory to preset specifications. It is not a moral way to bring a new human being into the world. When done for stem cell research, it involves the moral wrong of all embryonic stem cell research: destroying an innocent human life for possible benefit to others. Human cloning involves an additional wrong: It creates human beings solely in order to kill them for their cells. This is the ultimate reduction of a fellow human being to a mere instrument of other people's wishes.

**"Catholic health care institutions should not make use of human tissue obtained by direct abortions even for research and therapeutic purposes."**

*(Embryonic Stem Cell Research Fact Sheet, US Conference of Catholic Bishops 2005)*

**The March of Dimes, a national organization with international partners, makes funds available, through grants, for fetal tissue research.**

*(www.marchofdimes.com)*

## Papal Response to Embryonic Stem Cell Research and Cloning

The living human embryo, from the moment of conception, cannot be considered as a simple mass of cells. It is a human individual, and it has the right to its own life; and therefore every intervention that is not in favor of the embryo is an act that violates that right. The destruction of the inner cell mass of the embryo, which critically and irremediably damages the human embryo and curtails its development, is a gravely immoral act and consequently is gravely illicit.

The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life

In his *Declaration on the Production and Scientific and Therapeutic Use of Human Embryonic Stem Cells*, Pope Paul II writes, "**No end believed to be good, such as the use of stem cells for the preparation of other differentiated cells to be used in what look to be promising therapeutic procedures, can justify an intervention of this kind. A good end does not make right an action which in itself is wrong.**"

He goes on to write, "For Catholics, this position is explicitly confirmed by the Magisterium of the Church which, in the Encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, with reference to the Instruction *Donum Vitae* of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, affirms: 'The Church has always taught and continues to teach that the result of human procreation, from the first moment of its existence, must be guaranteed that unconditional respect which is morally due to the human being in his or her totality and unity in body and spirit: The human being is to be respected and treated as a person from the moment of conception; and therefore from that same moment his rights as a person must be recognized, among which in the first place is the inviolable right of every innocent human being to life.'"

It is morally illicit to engage in so-called therapeutic cloning by producing cloned human embryos and then destroying them in order to produce Embryonic Stem cells. In addressing the issue of therapeutic cloning, Pope John Paul II states, "**Every type of therapeutic cloning, which implies producing human embryos and then destroying them in order to obtain stem cells, is illicit...**"

On the ethical issue regarding the use of Embryonic Stem cells which are supplied by other researchers or are commercially obtainable, Pope John Paul II states, "The participation - formal or otherwise - in the morally illicit intention of the principal agent...entails a proximate material cooperation in the production and manipulation of human embryos on the part of those producing or supplying them."

Pope John Paul concludes, "In conclusion, it is not hard to see the seriousness and gravity of the ethical problem posed by the desire to extend to the field of human research the production and/or use of human embryos, even from an humanitarian perspective."

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### **Catholic Support for Ethically Acceptable Stem Cell Research**

(U. S. Conference of Catholic Bishops 2006)

Sometimes it is wrongly said that the Catholic Church opposes stem cell research. In fact, the Church supports ethically responsible stem cell research, while opposing any research that exploits or destroys human embryos. Because the Church opposes deliberately destroying innocent human life at any stage, for research or any other purpose, it opposes embryonic stem cell research as currently conducted.

The Catholic Church has long supported research using stem cells from adult tissue and umbilical cord blood, which poses no moral problem. Catholic institutions at times have taken the lead in promoting such constructive research, which is already providing cures and treatments for suffering patients:

In October 2005, the Catholic bishops of South Korea said they would raise and donate \$10 million to advance adult stem cell research.

A March 2005 breakthrough demonstrating the capabilities of adult stem cells in Australia was made possible by a grant of \$50,000 (Australian dollars) from the Catholic Archdiocese of Sydney.

In February 2005 a major Catholic teaching hospital in Boston, Caritas St. Elizabeth's Medical Center, announced that it had "identified adult stem cells that may have the capacity to repair and regenerate all tissue types in the body."

Throughout 2005 the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops has worked to pass federal legislation creating a nationwide public bank for umbilical cord blood stem cells for research and the treatment of a wide variety of diseases.

Monsignor Thomas Hartman, director of radio and television for the Catholic Diocese of Rockville Center, founded The Thomas Hartman Foundation for Parkinson's Research. The foundation has raised millions of dollars for adult stem cell research and other avenues for curing Parkinson's disease.

**"We must respect life at all times, especially when our goal is to save lives."** (*Catholic Support for Ethically Acceptable Stem Cell Research*, USCCB 2006)

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