

Human Embryos and Adult Stem Cells

Pope Benedict recently said, in an address that firmly underlined the Roman Catholic Church's stance against abortion and scientific research on embryos, "the loving eyes of God look on the human beings, as 'full and complete' at their beginning." Quoting Psalm 139, Benedict said "the Bible teaches that God already recognizes the embryo as a complete human. That view is the basis for the Church teaching that aborting or manipulating these embryos amounts to murder." In Psalm 139, the psalmist says to God: "Thou didst see my limbs unformed in the womb, and in thy book they are all recorded. It is extremely powerful, the idea in this psalm, that in this 'unformed' embryo God already sees the whole future," Benedict said. "In the Lord's book of life, the days that this creature will live and will fill with works during his time on earth are already written." The Pontiff also raised the theme in his Christmas Eve Mass, saying the love of God shines on each child, "even on those still unborn".

Dr. Peter Hollands, the Chief Science Officer of the UK Blood Bank and early pioneer of embryonic stem-cell research, recently stated that "modern stem-cell advancements in umbilical cord blood have rendered human embryonic stem-cell research unnecessary" he went on to call cord blood the "realistic future of stem-cell technology. As a scientist, and even as a lay person, it is simple to see that cord blood as a source of stem cells for therapy and research is the easiest route to take. We have a never ending supply of cord blood and if we can start to collect and store this valuable resource instead of discarding it then we will start to make real progress in stem cell therapy and research. Stem-cell researchers have taken advantage of the public ignorance about stem-cells.

The average person thinks that embryonic stem cells are the only option available [believing] if we are going to help those people suffering from disease then we have no option but to pursue embryonic stem cell technology. This is completely incorrect". Dr. Holland now believes that the media and celebrities are responsible for the current confusion about stem-cells. "The sooner we stop wasting precious resources on embryonic stem cells research the sooner we will have stem cell cures for the people who really matter in all of this - the patients".

There already are many promising avenues of stem cell research that do not require human embryos to be harmed. One exciting example is to manipulate adult stem cells back to the pluripotent stage (the stage at which the cells can morph into most body tissues). In July, legislation to expand federal funding of such ethical stem cell research passed the Senate unanimously. Unfortunately, the bill was blocked in the House. For partisan political motives, certain members were interested in funding only those types of stem cell research that require the killing of human embryos!

In Illinois, our Governor signed a bill into law that will encourage parents of newborns to donate the blood from their baby's umbilical cord so scientists can gather adult stem cells to use in research. We applaud him for doing that; however, we should point out that he also has by-passed the State Legislature and authorized \$10,000,000.00 for embryonic stem cell research! We cannot condone that action!

From the days of Hypocrites, the medical profession took an oath to "Do No Harm!" It seems to us that some in government are attempting to change the medical profession from a healing profession to a killing profession!

Recently Cardinal Alfonso Trujillo, director of the Pontifical Council for the Family, explained in an interview with Famiglia Christiana, that since embryonic stem cell research involves killing a human embryo, it entails excommunication just as an abortion does. "To destroy the embryo is equivalent to an abortion, and the excommunication applies to the woman, the doctors, the researchers who eliminate embryos," the Cardinal said.

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