

umbilical cords and placentas. Not only don't they carry the moral baggage of embryonic stem cells, but research with them is much further along. Unfortunately, embryonic stem-cell researchers have so powerful a PR machine that many influential people don't even know there's an alternative" (Syndicated column, 6/22/04). Remember that even if embryonic stem-cell research were promising, it would remain immoral because it involves the purposeful creation and destruction of an innocent human being.

While we may have the technology "to do" something, we do not necessarily have the moral mandate "to do" something. Just because we can do it, does not mean it ought to be done. Researchers cannot simply think and act as though they are free to do anything without being subject to moral parameters. We find ourselves slipping further down the slope of morality: first came the legislation and proliferation of contraception, then abortion, then in vitro fertilization, the cloning of animals and now embryonic stem-cell research. Of course we should not forget the proliferation of doctor-assisted suicide. The moral laws have been abandoned. Pope John Paul II in his great encyclical "The Gospel of Life" ("Evangelium Vitae") taught: "The first and fundamental step towards this cultural transformation consists in forming consciences with regard to the incomparable and inviolable worth of every human life. It is of the greatest importance to re-establish the essential connection between life and freedom. There are inseparable goods: where one is violated, the other also ends up

being violated. There is no true freedom where life is not welcomed and loved. ... No less critical in the formation of conscience is the recovery of the necessary link between freedom and truth. ...When freedom is detached from objective truth, it becomes impossible to establish personal rights on a first rational basis; and the ground is laid for society to be at the mercy of the unrestrained will of individuals or the oppressive totalitarianism of public authority" (No. 96). The time has come for true Catholics and all Christians to promote genuine freedom and truth in the defense of all human life.

Copyright © Arlington Catholic Herald, Inc.
All rights reserved. Used with permission.
Printed with ecclesiastical approval.

For Further Information Contact:

Pope John Paul II Society of Evangelists

14818 Ranchero Road

Hesperia, California, USA

Telephone: 760-220-6818

FAX: 760-948-7620

E-mail: pjpiisoe@earthlink.net

www.pjpiisoe.org

Pamphlet 120

Stem-Cell Research

Fr. William P. Saunders, Ph.D

The issue concerning stem-cell research certainly has entered the spotlight in the media and has become a very highly politicized issue. The problem is not with the research itself, but from whom one obtains the stem cells. Stem cells are like "master cells" that turn into other types of cells, like nerve, stomach, or brain cells. If one obtains adult stem cells from sources like fat and umbilical cord blood, such research is morally permissible.

In fact, such research has shown promising results. Adult stem cells have been used in bone-marrow transplants and in treatments of blood disorders and leukemia. Companies using adult stem cells are currently conducting clinical tests on treatments for heart attacks, liver disease, bone and cartilage diseases and brain disorders, including Parkinson's disease. Dr. Saul J. Sharkis of Johns Hopkins University recently published a study in which bone-marrow stem cells from animal donors were converted into healthy liver cells. He stated in The Washington Post (8/20/04), "It is mind-blowing stuff. I never would have thought this possible."

On the other hand, stem-cell research may also use embryonic stem cells. These stem cells are obtained by producing an embryo in vitro (i.e. in the laboratory) by fertilizing an ovum, allowing it to develop for a few days in a petri dish, and then extracting the cells, thereby killing the embryo. Such

research using embryonic stem cells is immoral.

The Catholic Church has consistently asserted that a human being must be respected as a person from the first moment of conception, the very first instance of existence. Each person is made in the image and likeness of God, and thereby has an inherent dignity beyond the rest of creation. The Declaration on Procured Abortion stated, "From the time that the ovum is fertilized, a new life is begun which is neither that of the father nor of the mother; it is rather the life of a new human being with his own growth. It would never be made human if it were not human already. To this perpetual evidence ... modern genetic science brings valuable confirmation. It has demonstrated that, from the first instant, the program is fixed as to what this living being will be: a man, this individual-man with his characteristic aspects already well determined. Right from fertilization is begun the adventure of human life, and each of its great capacities requires time ... to find its place and to be in a position to act" (No. 12-13). Moreover, we believe that almighty God creates and infuses an immortal soul, which truly gives each of us that identity of one made in His image and likeness. Never should any person forget that he or she started life as that one unique cell at the moment of conception.

Therefore, with embryonic stem-cell research, the subject matter is a person who is purposely created to be destroyed. In 1961, Blessed Pope John XXIII taught, "The transmission of human life is entrusted by nature to a personal and conscious act and as

such is subject to the all-holy laws of God: immutable and inviolable laws which must be recognized and observed (*Mater et Magistra*). Such moral laws include the following: First, a child has a right to be respected as a person from the moment of conception until natural death. Second, a child has the right to be the fruit of the conjugal love of his parents, who are united in marriage. Third, a child has a right to be born. (*Confer Donum vitae*, II, 8.) Given these moral laws, the production of human beings for the sake of experimentation, research, or the harvesting of organs is morally wrong. Human beings are not disposable biological material (*Donum vitae*, I, 5).

Nevertheless, a great push currently exists for embryonic stem-cell research. This push comes from celebrities with disabilities. Actors Christopher Reeve and Michael J. Fox have made many public appearances, even before Congress, promoting embryonic stem-cell research. In their consciences, they must not be aware that they desire the death of someone else to save their own lives. Yet, their pleas coupled with their conditions have pulled at the heart strings of many people who make moral decisions based on feelings rather than on rational thinking.

This push has motivated legislators to promote this cause: For instance, the California Stem-Cell Research and Cure Initiative, proposed legislation, would require the spending of \$295 million each year over a 10-year period for embryonic stem-cell research. The legislation does permit "somatic cell nuclear transfer" research, which is technically a type of

cloning. The proponents of this legislation plead that this research would "significantly reduce state health care costs in the future," which of course cannot be proven or guaranteed. Abandoning rational thinking (even their professed faith), too many politicians play on the emotional feelings of others just to get one more vote.

Keep in mind there is no real proof that embryonic stem-cell research will bring about any more benefit than adult stem-cell research. While the question mentioned Ron Reagan's speech at the Democratic convention this past Summer, Michael Reagan rebutted, defending the position of his late father, President Reagan. Michael quoted his father's 1983 statement: "My administration is dedicated to the preservation of America as a free land and there is no cause more important for preserving that freedom than affirming the transcendent right to life of all human beings, the right without which no other rights have any meaning." He then quoted Dr. Ronald McKay, a stem-cell researcher at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke: "'People need a fairy tale,' he said, explaining why scientists have allowed society to believe wrongly that stem cells are likely to effectively treat Alzheimer's disease. He added, 'Maybe that's unfair, but they need a story line that's relatively simple to understand.'" Reagan also quoted Michael Fumento, whom he called "one of the nation's most skilled debunkers of junk science": "Over the horizon are so-called adult stem cells, extracted from people of any age and from