

STEM CELL RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Is the Catholic Church opposed to all stem cell research? No. The Catholic Church supports adult stem cell research. Adult stem cell research uses cells obtained from adult tissue, umbilical cord blood, bone marrow, and even fat cells. These cells are obtained without causing the destruction of human life.

Why is the Catholic Church opposed to Embryonic Stem Cell Research? The Church is opposed to embryonic stem cell research because harvesting the stem cells kills the living human embryo. The Church opposes the direct destruction of innocent human life for any purpose, including research.

Why is it wrong to use human embryos for research if they are going to be discarded anyway? In the end we all die anyway, but that gives no one a right to kill us. In any case, these embryos will not die because they are inherently unable to survive, but because others are choosing to hand them over for destructive research. One wrong choice does not justify an additional wrong choice. The idea of experimenting on human beings because they may die anyway also poses a grave threat to convicted prisoners, terminally ill patients, and others.

What has adult stem cell research accomplished? Thousands of lives have been saved by adult stem cells – most often in the form of “bone marrow transplants” for leukemia and other conditions. Today, adult stem cells have been used to help people with Parkinson’s disease, spinal cord injury, sickle-cell anemia, heart disease and dozens of other conditions. The danger is that this progress toward cures will be halted or slowed by campaigns that divert attention and resources toward embryonic stem cell research.

Has embryonic stem cell research led to any cures? No, embryonic stem cell research is largely speculation. Embryonic stem cells have never treated a human patient, and animal trials suggest that they are too genetically unstable and too likely to form lethal tumors to be used for treatment any time soon.

Is the Church telling us to choose the lives of embryos over the lives of suffering patients? No. The Church 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. Moreover, treatments using adult stem cells, which do not require destroying any human life, are already healing some conditions and are far closer to healing other conditions than embryonic stem cells. The choice is not between science and ethics, but between science that is ethically responsible and science that is not.

Where can more information about the Church’s position on stem cell research and other issues be found? More information about stem cell research can be found at the US Conference of Catholic Bishop’s website at:

<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic/stemcell/index.shtml>

<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic/stemcell/Q%26ABulletinInsert09222004.pdf>

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