

## Five Myths The Religious Right Would Have You Believe About Stem Cell Research

PRINT

Written by Administrator

Monday, 07 August 2006

### Progressive Christian Talking Points *Stem Cell Research*

This is the first installment of what we we hope will be regular talking points. This week, Frank Coccozzelli, Esq. articulates some clear positions for Progressive Christians to stand their ground in reference to the stem cell research issue. While the Congress failed to override the veto of President Bush, the issue will continue to arise in the mid-term elections and beyond.

**MYTH 1: ADULT STEM CELL RESEARCH HAS ELIMINATED THE NEED FOR EMBRYONIC STEM CELLS.** On the contrary, embryonic stem cells contain the key to unlocking the full potential of adult stem cell research. The success of adult stem cell research is inextricably linked with the study of embryonic stem cells.

Those who oppose this research on religious grounds too often make their arguments using incorrect premises. For example they will say that adult stem research renders embryonic stem cell research unnecessary. They will also incorrectly claim that adult stem cells are being used for treatments of sixty to seventy different medical conditions: this too is a gross exaggeration. Such statements are an assault of mendacity being led by US Senator Same Brownback (R-Kansas; Brownback, for the record is an Opus Dei cooperater the reactionary sect within Catholic Church leading the war against this research[i]).

Furthermore, opponents of embryonic stem cell research excessively hype the current effectiveness of adult stem cells. As a recent press release from the Genetics Policy Institute observed:

On July 13, three stem cell experts published a letter in the journal "Science", along with detailed supporting data, that has demolished the lynchpin argument and key talking point of the religious right and others who oppose the expansion of funding for embryonic stem cell research.

Dr. David Prentice of the Family Research Council had long- promoted a list of 65 medical conditions supposedly treated by adult stem cells, thereby sending the message that adult stem cells were currently delivering treatments and thus there was no need to fund embryonic stem cell research.

The letter to "Science" stated in its concluding paragraph "By promoting the falsehood that adult stem cell treatments are already in general use for 65 diseases and injuries, Prentice and those who repeat his claims mislead laypeople and cruelly deceive patients."

"Only nine of the so-called treatments were actually approved by the FDA. In fact, much of the Prentice list was comprised of anecdotal data drawn from such sources as testimony from Congressional hearings, distortions of published research reports and even a newspaper clipping," said Bernard Siegel, executive director of the Genetics Policy Institute.[ii]

**MYTH 2: ALL RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS OPPOSE EMBRYONIC STEM CELL AND SOMATIC CELL NUCLEAR TRANSFER RESEARCH.** In reality, different organized religions take different or no position at all on the research. In fact, many religious organizations, including the Presbyterian Church USA, the Church of England, the American Jewish Congress, United Church of Christ, the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, Foundry United Methodist Church and a clear majority of America Roman Catholics[iii] all support this potentially life saving research.

As William Neaves of the Stowers Institute observed, "Other religious traditions acknowledge the product not fertilization to be a life but do not accord it the status of a human being. For example, both Judaism and Islam hold that full human status is acquired progressively during embryonic development, not at fertilization.[iv] Until 40 days after conception, Judaism considers the developing embryo to be "mere fluid." The early embryo is respected as a potential human being, but it is not yet a person. Accordingly, both Judaism and Islam permit the use of embryonic stem cells for therapeutic and research purposes."[v]

Beyond that, all four branches of Judaism support embryonic stem cell research pursuant to the halakic doctrine of pekuach nefesh—the preeminence of saving a life in being. Under Jewish Law a fourteen-day embryo has the same status as water. There is a very similar concept in Christian thought known as Epikiea. Great thinkers of the Judeo-Christian tradition have always understood that sometimes one needs to break the letter of the Law in order to achieve the spirit of the Law.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, saving a life in being is often the holiest of songs. And if the written rules of faith are the keys to such music, then as with music we sometime must break the letter of the Law to achieve the spirit of God's Law.

A good example is the famous song "Maria" written by Leonard Bernstein for his masterpiece West Side Story. The song, written in the key of C (no sharps or flats) famously uses the tri-tone, i.e. key of C with a prominent F#. The three note melody of the word "Maria" is C F# G. The tritone, or "flat-five," is generally considered the most

dissonant interval, but without that dissonance from the rules for the key of C, the song Maria would lose its essence.

To put it in musical terms, stem cell research is the prominent F# in curing disease. It is the change we need to effect to do the greatest good: saving lives in being.

The Gospels consistently detail how Jesus adhered to Pekuach nefesh through His many acts of healing. And as a Christians who have read the Gospels, the IPC leadership cannot cite one example of Jesus directly refuting pekuach nefesh. It logically follows that a Jesus who lived by Jewish law raises a presumption that He would not oppose this vital medical research. If anything, His healing the infirmed and disabled along with raising the dead contradicts those who oppose this research solely on religious grounds.

**MYTH 3: PRESIDENT BUSH'S AUGUST 9, 2001 DECISION ALLOWS EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH TO PROCEED UNHINDERED.** Wrong. The President has only authorized research on those embryonic stem cell lines in existence on August 9, 2001---originally believed to number between 60 and 70 lines. And according to an article in the March 4, 2004 Washington Post, "...At least 16 of the 78 human stem cell colonies approved by President Bush for federal research money have died or failed to reproduce in their laboratory dishes -- making them useless to scientists." As of today only 12 lines are available for research and of these only 4 are in the possession of U. S. researchers.

**MYTH 4: ADULT STEM CELL RESEARCH MAKES NUCLEAR TRANSFER RESEARCH UNNECESSARY.** In fact, neither embryonic stem nor adult stem research may fully solve the problem of a patient's body rejecting stem cell treatments. With somatic cell nuclear transfer research, the patient's own DNA is used in the process thus providing a viable solution to the problem of body rejection.

**MYTH 5: PRESIDENT BUSH OPPOSES EMBRYONIC STEM CELL AND NUCLEAR TRANSFER RESEARCH BECAUSE HE'S PRO-LIFE.** If President Bush were truly pro- life, why did he—as well as research opponents Senators Jim Talent and Rick Santorum continue--to take hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions from tobacco special interest groups? Consider this: tobacco has the potential to end lives but embryonic stem cell and somatic cell nuclear transfer research have the potential to save lives.


-----  
[i] Senator Sam Brownback, columnist Robert Novak, the socially conservative member of President Bush's Bioethics Council, Robert P. George and Newark Archbishop John Myers have all been vocal opponents of embryonic stem cell research. While Archbishop Myers is an Opus Dei member, Brownback, George and Novak deny they are officially members of the sect. Yet this denial does not tell the whole story because all three men (as well as Senator Rick Santorum, R-PA.) clearly act as Opus Dei "cooperators." While not officially members, cooperators of Opus Dei are clear simpatico with the sect's goals and often act on its behalf, going as far as donating money. Both Brownback and Novak were baptized by the infamous Opus Dei priest, John McCloskey.

[ii] Press Release, Genetics Policy Institute, July 17, 2006  
[iii] Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, August 13, 2005; link:

<http://pewforum.org/news/display.php?NewsID=5238>

[iv] Citing, Ebenstein, R. Fall 2004 Participation in creation to heal the world. B'nai B'rith Magazine, 28-31

[v] William B. Neaves, When Does Life Begin? Stowers Institute for Medical Research, 2005.

 **LIST OF COMMENTS**

**1/2. You forgot Psalm 139:16**

Written by Don Costello

Sunday, September 24 2006

Website



Greetings in the name of Jesus You for got to mention Psalm 139:16(KJV)that mentions how God saw David's "embryo". The Hebrew word for substance in verse 16 literally means "embryo". God was watching over David's embryo as it was progressing from embryo stage to a full gestational infant. How come you don't mention that? Don Costello

## 2/2. Psalm 139:16 doesn't apply

Written by wrlang

Sunday, November 05 2006

Website



"your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." This is a person talking about his beliefs in what God sees. If it were God, there's no commitment to the embryo. If you're saying his life was God's will from embryo on then he had no free will. No free will means everything everyone does is actually God's responsibility. So if it is God talking, then all it means is that God doesn't need a microscope to see an embryo.



[Add Comments](#)

Last Updated ( Wednesday, 23 August 2006 )

[Close Window](#)