

Christianity and stem cells

This Just In . . . from an organization called the Institute for Progressive Christianity:

The following articulates a theological basis for Christians to support the federal funding of Embryonic Stem Cell Research. Contrary to popular belief, there is no single "Christian" position—let alone single religious position--on stem cell medical science. This statement is intended to correct three (3) commonly held myths regarding this research. To read about other Religious Right myths on stem cell research by going to the IPC Web Site at:

<http://instituteforprogressivechristianity.org/joomla/>

MYTH 1: ADULT STEM CELL RESEARCH HAS ELIMINATED THE NEED FOR EMBRYONIC STEM CELLS Those who oppose this research on religious grounds too often make their arguments using incorrect premises. They claim that adult stem research renders embryonic stem cell research unnecessary. They will also incorrectly claim that adult stem cells are being used for treatment 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, cooperator for Opus Dei, an ultra-orthodox Catholic lay group that is leading the war against this research.

As a recent press release from the Genetics Policy Institute observed:

"On July 13, 2006 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."

Furthermore, many well-respected adult stem cell researchers have repeatedly stressed the importance of embryonic stem cell research for comparative analysis. The success of each depends upon the other.

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 all support this potentially life saving research.

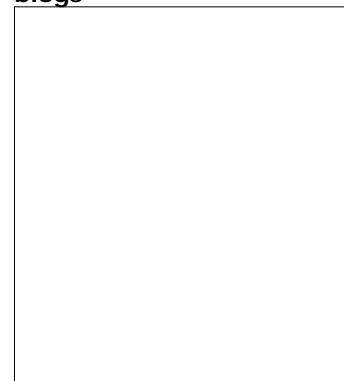
All four branches of Judaism support embryonic stem cell research pursuant to the halakic doctrine of pekuach nefesh—the preeminence of saving a life in being. Under Jewish Law a fourteen-day embryo has the same status as water. There is a very similar concept in Christian thought known as Epikiea. Great 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.

The Gospels consistently detail how Jesus adhered to Pekuach nefesh through His many acts of healing. And as 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.

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