



## **EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH**

Stem cell research should interest every citizen. It offers wonderful hope for future health breakthroughs. It also poses great risks for the misuse of science by violating human dignity under the guise of advancing it. The Church affirms that human life is a gift from God. Therefore it needs to be respected from the moment of conception until natural death.

Crucial distinctions need to be made in the public discussion over stem cell research. Two categories of stem cells show experimental promise – adult and embryonic. Adult stem cells derive from various sources. They can be retrieved from amniotic fluid, bone marrow, umbilical cord blood, and dental pulp. There is no moral objection to research and therapies involving adult stem cells when they involve no harm to human beings at any stage of development and are conducted with proper informed consent.

In contrast, embryonic stem cells derive from the living bodies of human embryos. The embryos are killed by the process and so this type of research entails the wrongful destruction of innocent human life. Human dignity can never truly benefit from this kind of lethal exploitation.

Embryonic stem cells, unlike adult stem cells, have proven very difficult to work with and tend to form tumors in experiments. Despite massive media excitement and frequent scientific promises, to date no clinical treatments have derived from embryonic stem cells. Meanwhile, adult stem cells now provide treatments for more than 70 different medical conditions.

Respect for every human person – including human embryos – should be the guiding principle in all scientific research involving human subjects, as well as for the legislative and executive branches of government that will decide the funding mechanisms and scope of medical research. Disrespect for the human person at any stage sets a precedent for disrespecting human dignity at every stage. This is why the promise of embryonic stem cell research is so destructive and misleading.

The building of a culture of life begins with each one of us. We all have a vital role to play in fostering a culture that respects the dignity of all human life. How we pursue stem cell research today will shape how society views human beings in the future.