

## **FACT SHEET: PRESIDENT BUSH'S STEM CELL DECISION**

**The Catholic bishops of the United States have strongly opposed the National Institutes of Health guidelines for embryonic stem cell research issued on August 25, 2000. The guidelines provided no federal funds for the act of destroying human embryos, or for research using embryos specially created for research; federal funds could support research on stem cells obtained by the privately funded destruction of “excess” embryos from fertility clinics. On August 9, 2001, after suspending the guidelines for several months’ review, President Bush announced that he will implement them, with one change: funding will extend only to cell lines already in existence as of August 9, in an effort to prevent such funding from encouraging the destruction of human embryos in the future.**

**Key points in the critique of this policy by the Catholic bishops’ conference:**

**Research on cell lines already established by destroying human embryos does not avoid moral complicity in such destruction.**

These human embryos did not die of natural causes, or for reasons unrelated to researchers’ goals. They were destroyed *for the sake of* this research, in ways tailored to provide the most usable cells for the research. Federal funds will be awarded directly to those researchers who destroyed the embryos for this purpose, or to those who pay those researchers for the right to use the cell lines.

**The fact that the embryos were destroyed with private funds does not solve the moral problem.**

The embryos were destroyed in anticipation of receiving federal grants for the resulting research. The researchers created the cell lines following the NIH’s standards for obtaining consent from the embryos’ parents, etc., so they would qualify for federal grants.

**The new policy abandons important ethical limits found in current law on fetal tissue research.**

Fetal tissue research is ineligible for federal funding if: an abortion was performed specifically to obtain the tissue; the researcher influenced the timing, manner or method of the abortion; or the tissue was harvested before fetal death (42 USC §§289g-1, 289g-2). These limits are violated when federal funds support research that depends for its existence on destructive cell harvesting from live embryos.

**Past Catholic statements on individuals’ use of vaccines developed from fetal tissue are not relevant to this issue.**

Catholic moralists have concluded that individuals, when they have no practical alternative, may use vaccines to protect their health and the health of their loved ones without serious sin, even if the vaccines were cultured in fetal cells that ultimately came from an elective abortion. However, Catholic teaching rejects all complicity in abortion, and the Church has opposed any collaboration with abortionists (including government collaboration) to obtain tissue for vaccines or other research. The embryonic stem cell issue poses an even more serious problem because live human embryos were directly destroyed precisely to obtain the cells.

**Some doctrinal sources to explain the problem of funding this research.**

*Donum Vitae* (Instruction on Respect for Human Life In its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: Replies to Certain Questions of the Day, Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1987):

“To use human embryos or fetuses as the object or instrument of experimentation constitutes a crime against their dignity as human beings having a right to the same respect that is due to the child already born and to every human person...

*The corpses of human embryos and fetuses, whether they have been deliberately aborted or not, must be respected just as the remains of other human beings. ....Furthermore, the moral requirements must be safeguarded, that there be no complicity in deliberate abortion and that the risk of scandal be avoided”* (I.4).

*“It is a duty to condemn the particular gravity of the voluntary destruction of human embryos obtained ‘in vitro’ for the sole purpose of research...”* (I.5).

*Declaration on the Production and the Scientific and Therapeutic Use of Human Embryonic Stem Cells* (Pontifical Academy for Life, 2000):

*“Is it morally licit to use ES [embryonic stem] cells, and the differentiated cells obtained from them, which are supplied by other researchers or are commercially obtainable?”*

*“The answer is negative, since: Prescinding from the participation B formal or otherwise B in the morally illicit intention of the principal agent, the case in question entails a proximate material cooperation in the production and manipulation of human embryos on the part of those producing or supplying them”* (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, p. 17).

**A policy limitation to “already existing cell lines” is an arbitrary line which may not hold in practice.**

When this proposal was first discussed, there were said to be only 12 existing cell lines; now there are said to be 60, many of them perhaps created in recent weeks in anticipation of such a policy. Scientists will undoubtedly continue to kill additional embryos with private funds, and if the first set of 60 proves inadequate they will recommend these new cell lines for use in federally funded research. On what principled basis will such funding be refused, since these embryos as well will now be “dead already”?

**The problem of scandal is also relevant, as even limited government funding encourages for-profit companies to engage in this destructive research.**

The value of stock in for-profit stem cell companies increased the day of the President’s speech. Federal funding tends to encourage more privately funded destructive embryo research, by (a) removing some of its ethical stigma and (b) providing the “seed money” for the early, non-profitable stages of the research. If this research leads to possible treatments, private investment in such efforts will increase greatly and the demand for many thousands of cell lines with different genetic profiles will be difficult to resist.

Secretariat for Pro-Life Activities  
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