

Genetics, Ethics & Meaning
INItiative
(GEMINI)

Life Sciences and Society
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Module 3

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Religious Stances on Stem Cell Research

Orthodox Church



In light of the fact that Orthodox Christianity accepts the fact that human life begins at conception, the extraction of stem cells from embryos, which involves the willful taking of human life -- the embryo is human life and not just a "clump of cells" -- is considered morally and ethically wrong in every instance.

Orthodox Church and Stem Cell Research
<http://www.oca.org/QA.asp?ID=68&SID=3>

United Church of Christ



The Twenty-third General Synod of the United Church of Christ supports federally-funded embryonic stem cell research within ethically sound guidelines (including concern for justice, privacy, access to the benefits of the research for all) and the limitations set forth by the National Institutes of Health

General Synod Resolution 30

<http://www.ucc.org/synod/resolutions/res30.htm>

Union of American Hebrew Congregations (Reform Jews)

There is an emerging consensus of Reform Jewish authorities that tissue obtained from either therapeutic or spontaneous abortions may be used for purposes of life-saving or life-enhancing research and treatment. Jewish requirements that we use our God-given knowledge to heal people, together with the concept of pikuach nefesh (the primary responsibility to save human life, which overrides almost all other laws), has been used by Jewish legal authorities to justify a broad range of organ transplants and medical experimentation. These requirements likewise justify the use of fetal tissue transplants. Read more

Stem Cell Research- Religious Groups Weigh In
http://www.belief.net/story/82/story_8277_1.html

Catholic Church

Human embryos obtained in vitro are human beings and are subjects with rights; their dignity and right to life must be respected from the first moment of their existence. It is immoral to produce human embryos destined to be exploited as disposable 'biological material. In vitro fertilization is not the only way to obtain stem cells. They can be extracted from adults (not as usable for research) or from an umbilical cord after a child is born. The Catholic Church has no objection to research using stem cells in those ways. The use of that research is a separate, but related, moral issue.

Stem Cell Research and the Catholic Church--

<http://www.americancatholic.org/News/StemCell/default.asp>

Episcopal Church



A task force reporting to the Episcopal Church's 2003 General Convention concluded that "it is in keeping with our call to heal the afflicted" to make use of embryos already held in fertility clinics, but took a "conservative and balanced approach," its chairman said, in stressing that the task force "does not recommend that embryos be created for this research."

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United Methodist Church

There are a number of potential sources for stem cells, including adult tissues, fetal remains, umbilical cord blood, and human embryos. The use of adult stem cells and stem cells derived from umbilical cord blood raise few moral questions. The use of human embryos as a source for stem cells has been the subject of intense moral debate. Given the reality that most, if not all, of these excess embryos will be discarded—we believe that it is morally tolerable to use existing embryos for stem cell research purposes. This position is a matter of weighing the danger of further eroding the respect due to potential life against the possible, therapeutic benefits that are hoped for from such research. The same judgment of moral tolerability would apply to the use of embryos left from future reproductive efforts if a decision has been made not to introduce them into the womb. We articulate this position with an attitude of caution, not license. We reiterate our opposition to the creation of embryos for the sake of research.

Ethics of Embryonic Stem Cell Research

http://www.interpretermagazine.org/interior_print.asp?ptid=4&mid=6560&pagemode=print

Presbyterian Church

The 213th General Assembly (2001) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), affirms the use of fetal tissue and embryonic tissue for vital research. Our respect for life includes respect for the embryo and fetus, and we affirm that decisions about embryos and fetuses need to be made with responsibility. Therefore, we believe that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and other faith groups should educate their members in making these very difficult ethical decisions. With careful regulation, we affirm the use of human stem cell tissue for research that may result in the restoring of health to those suffering from serious illness. We affirm our support for stem cell research, recognizing that this research moves to a new and challenging frontier. We recognize the need for continuing, informed public dialogue and equitable sharing of information of the results of stem cell research. It is only with such public dialogue and information sharing that our diverse society can build a foundation for responsible movement toward this frontier that offers enormous hope and challenge.

Actions of the 213th General Assembly (2001)

<http://www.pcusa.org/oga/actions-of-213.htm#attachment>

Southern Baptist Convention



The Southern Baptist Convention is on record for its enduring, consistent, and vigorous opposition to 1) elective abortion, 2) the use of fetal tissues harvested from elective abortions for research, and 3) experimentation using human embryonic stem cells obtained from electively-aborted embryos.

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Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America & The Rabbinical Counsel of America

Our Torah tradition places great value upon human life; we are taught in the opening chapters of Genesis that each human was created in God's very image. The potential to save and heal human lives is an integral part of valuing human life from the traditional Jewish perspective. Moreover, our rabbinic authorities inform us that an isolated fertilized egg does not enjoy the full status of person-hood and its attendant protections. Thus, if embryonic stem cell research can help us preserve and heal humans with greater success, and does not require or encourage the destruction of life in the process, it ought to be pursued. Nevertheless, we must emphasize, that research on embryonic stem cells must be conducted under careful guidelines. Critical elements of these guidelines, from our perspective, relate to where the embryonic stem cells to be researched upon are taken from. We believe it is entirely appropriate to utilize for this research existing embryos, such as those created for IVF purposes that would otherwise be discarded but for this research. We think it another matter to create embryos ab initio (Latin: from the beginning) for the sole purpose of conducting this form of research.

Letter to President Bush Regarding Stem Cell Research-
<http://www.ou.org/public/statements/2001/nate34.htm>

United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism

The Committee on Jewish Law and Standards overwhelmingly approved... using human embryonic germ cells from aborted fetuses and embryonic stem cells from frozen human embryos originally created for procreation but now about to be discarded - "for research into creating cures for a number of human ailments"; [and] further permits creating stem cells for research by combining donated sperm eggs in a petri dish, cloning, or by extracting a cell from an early embryo, under specific conditions; the teshuvah limits itself to research for therapeutic purposes and not enhancement; and the teshuvah also calls for education of our laity regarding donation of an aborted fetus or unused frozen embryos for the purpose of such life-saving research.

The United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism publicly advocates for the use of human embryonic germ and stem cells for research in all appropriate ways

Stem Cell Research and Education

http://www.uscj.org/Stem_Cell_Research_a6675.html

Assemblies of God

Stem cell research shows great promise for the cure of numerous diseases and should proceed under appropriate ethical guidelines regularly reviewed and revised. There are stem cells available for research from legitimate sources that do not compromise the sanctity of human life. The practice of cultivating stem cells from the tissue of aborted fetuses perpetuates the evil of abortion and should be prohibited. Likewise, the cultivation of stem cells from the "left-over" embryos from fertility clinics raises serious ethical concerns for human life. Great care must always be exercised in the cultivation of stem cells to insure that the sanctity and dignity of human life are not compromised.

The Sanctity of Human Life-

http://www.ag.org/top/beliefs/position_papers/4196_sanctity_human_life.cfm

Islam



As there is no one leader or association of Islamic congregation that has a mandate to speak for a large proportion of the faith, this issue, like others, must be decided on a personal and local level within the community. However, in several papers it is mentioned that embryonic stem cell research is not innately wrong in Islamic law, as a fetus is not considered to be a person until the fourth month of pregnancy. Although elective abortion is considered wrong even during this period it is not equated with the use of stem cells, as these cells are not in the womb and thus cannot result in life.

Federal Funding for Stem Cell Research?

<http://www.islam-online.net/english/Views/2001/08/article6.shtml>

An Islamic Perspective on Stem Cell Research-

<http://www.islam101.com/science/stemCells.htm>

No Stated Position:

**Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints,
Unitarian Universalist Association,
Jehovah's Witnesses**

Image Resources

- Orthodox Church
<http://www.stnicholasorthodoxscranton.org/images/ChurchNoWires800.jpg>
- United Church of Christ
<http://www.doverducc.org/media/media-3076.gif>
- Mosque
<http://flickr.com/photos/oberazzi/387967176/sizes/m/>
- Episcopal
<http://flickr.com/photos/wallyg/656116322/>
- Rockefeller Chapel (In Southern Baptist Convention Slide)
<http://flickr.com/photos/fensterbme/224758315/>