

Stamcellen: welke toekomst voor therapie ?

Address Of His Holiness Benedict XVI to the participants in the symposium on the theme: “Stem cells: what future for therapy?” organized by the Pontifical Academy For Life



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Venerable Brothers in the Episcopate and in the Priesthood, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I address a cordial greeting to you all. This meeting with you, scientists and scholars dedicated to specialized research in the treatment of diseases that are a serious affliction to humanity, is a special comfort to me.

I am grateful to the organizers who have promoted this Congress on a topic that has become more and more important in recent years. The specific theme of the Symposium is appropriately formulated with a question open to hope: “Stem cells: what future for therapy?”.

I thank Bishop Elio Sgreccia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, for his kind words, also on behalf of the International Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC), an association that has cooperated in organizing the Congress and is represented here by Prof. Gianluigi Gigli, outgoing President, and Prof. Simon de Castellvi, President-elect.

When science is applied to the alleviation of suffering and when it discovers on its way new resources, it shows two faces rich in humanity: through the sustained ingenuity invested in research, and through the benefit announced to all who are afflicted by sickness.

Those who provide financial means and encourage the necessary structures for study share in the merit of this progress on the path of civilization.

On this occasion, I would like to repeat what I said at a recent Audience: “Progress becomes true progress only if it serves the human person and if the human person grows: not only in terms of his or her technical power, but also in his or her moral awareness” (cf. General Audience, 16 August 2006).

In this light, somatic stem-cell research also deserves approval and encouragement when it felicitously combines scientific knowledge, the most advanced technology in the biological field and ethics that postulate respect for the human being at every stage of his or her existence.

The prospects opened by this new chapter in research are fascinating in themselves, for they give a glimpse of the possible cure of degenerative tissue diseases that subsequently threaten those affected with disability and death.

How is it possible not to feel the duty to praise all those who apply themselves to this research and all who support the organization and cover its expenses?

I would like in particular to urge scientific structures that draw their inspiration and organization from the Catholic Church to increase this type of research and to establish the closest possible contact with one another and with those who seek to relieve human suffering in the proper ways.

May I also point out, in the face of the frequently unjust accusations of insensitivity addressed to the Church, her constant support for research dedicated to the cure of diseases and to the good of humanity throughout her 2,000-year-old history.

If there has been resistance – and if there still is – it was and is to those forms of research that provide for the planned suppression of human beings who already exist, even if they have not yet been born. Research, in such cases, irrespective of efficacious therapeutic results is not truly at the service of humanity.

In fact, this research advances through the suppression of human lives that are equal in dignity to the lives of other human individuals and the lives of the researchers themselves.

History itself has condemned such a science in the past and will condemn it in the future, not only because it lacks the light of God but also because it lacks humanity.

I would like to repeat here what I already wrote some time ago: Here there is a problem that we cannot get around; no one can dispose of human life. An insurmountable limit to our possibilities of doing and of experimenting must be established. The human being is not a disposable object, but every single individual represents God's presence in the world (cf. J. Ratzinger, *God and the World*, Ignatius Press, 2002).

In the face of the actual suppression of the human being there can be no compromises or prevarications. One cannot think that a society can effectively combat crime when society itself legalizes crime in the area of conceived life.

On the occasion of recent Congresses of the Pontifical Academy for Life, I have had the opportunity to reassert the teaching of the Church, addressed to all people of good will, on the human value of the newly conceived child, also when considered prior to implantation in the uterus.

The fact that you at this Congress have expressed your commitment and hope to achieve new therapeutic results from the use of cells of the adult body without recourse to the suppression of newly conceived human beings, and the fact that your work is being rewarded by results, are confirmation of the validity of the Church's constant invitation to full respect for the human being from conception. The good of human beings should not only be sought in universally valid goals, but also in the methods used to achieve them.

A good result can never justify intrinsically unlawful means. It is not only a matter of a healthy criterion for the use of limited financial resources, but also, and above all, of respect for the fundamental human rights in the area of scientific research itself.

I hope that God will grant your efforts – which are certainly sustained by God who acts in every person of good will and for the good of all – the joy of discovering the truth, wisdom in consideration and respect for every human being, and success in the search for effective remedies to human suffering.

To seal this hope, I cordially impart an affectionate Blessing to all of you, to your collaborators and to your relatives, as well as to the patients who will benefit from your ingenuity and resourcefulness and the results of your work, with the assurance of my special remembrance in prayer.