Religious Groups’ Official Positions on Stem Cell Research

July 17, 2008

American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

The group has no explicit policy on the issue; rather it states that “one must be guided by one’s own relationship with God and Scripture.”

- Correspondence with representative from the American Baptist Churches in the U.S.A.

Buddhism

Though Buddhist teachings do not directly address the issue, there are two main tenets – the prohibition against harming or destroying others (ahimsa), and the pursuit of knowledge (prajña) and compassion (karuṇa) – that divide Buddhist scholars and communities. Some Buddhists argue that stem cell research is in accordance with the Buddhist tenet of seeking knowledge and ending human suffering, while others argue that it is a violation of the notion of not harming others.

- ABC Science, “Buddhism at one with stem cell research”
- Damien Keown, “No Harm Applies to Stem Cell Embryos: One Buddhist’s View” (reprinted by Beliefnet.com)
- Sompram Pronta, Philosophy Department and Center for Buddhist Studies, Chulalongkorn University, “Human Cloning and Embryonic Stem Cell Research: A View from Theravada Buddhist Morality”

Catholicism

In accordance with their anti-abortion stance, the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops supports adult stem cell research but opposes embryonic stem cell research since it creates or destroys human embryos.

- U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Catholic Support for Ethically Acceptable Stem Cell Research"

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has not issued a statement on the issue of stem cell research.

- The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Newsroom, Public Issues: “Embryonic Stem-cell Research”

Episcopal Church

In 2004, the church’s governing body, the General Convention, declared itself in favor of stem cell research as long as the embryos used would have been destroyed otherwise, the embryos were not created solely for research purposes and the embryos were not bought or sold.


Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

The ELCA does not have an official position on the issue. In 2005, the Churchwide Assembly, the governing body of the church, created a task force to study the issues of genetics and biotechnology and to present a report in 2011.

- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, “A Proposed Social Statement on Genetics”

Hinduism

Though Hinduism believes that life begins at conception, the religion has no official position on stem cell research.
Islam

There is no explicit Islamic ruling on the issue of stem cell research. While some Muslim leaders allow for stem cell research on the ground that, according to Islam, an embryo in the early stage of pregnancy does not have a soul, others argue that the termination of an embryo at any stage of pregnancy is morally impermissible.

- Islam 101: “An Islamic Perspective on Stem Cells Research”

Judaism

All major Jewish denominations – including the Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Reconstructionist movements – support both embryonic and adult stem cell research as long as it is for medical or therapeutic purposes.

- Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, “Stem Cell Research, Position of the Reform Jewish Movement”
- Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association, “Resolution on Educational and Political Support for Stem Cell Research”

Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

In 2005, the group reaffirmed its opposition to embryonic stem cell research, advocating instead for adult stem cell research.

- Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, “Christian Faith and Human Beginnings: Christian Care and Pre-implementation Human Life”

National Association of Evangelicals

In 2005, the National Association of Evangelicals issued a statement voicing its opposition to stem cell research.


National Council of Churches

After an evaluation in 2006 of the debate surrounding stem cell research, the National Council of Churches’ Human Biotechnologies Policy Development Committee adopted a position stating that “as a result of a lack of clear consensus [among ethicists, academia and scientists], the National Council of Churches neither endorses nor condemns experimentation on human embryos.”


Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)

In 2004, the Presbyterian Church’s governing body, the General Assembly, reaffirmed its position in favor of stem cell research that is intended to “[restore health] to those suffering from serious illness.”


Southern Baptist Convention

In 1999, the Southern Baptist Convention reaffirmed its “opposition to the destruction of human embryos … [and] support for the development of alternative treatments which do not require human embryos to be killed.”

- Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution On Human Embryonic and Stem Cell Research”

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

In 2006, the association’s policymaking body, the General Assembly, stated its support for stem cell research as long as the research is for medical therapies and not the reproductive cloning of humans.

- Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, Social Justice Statements, “Pass the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act”
United Church of Christ

In 2001, the United Church of Christ ruled in favor of research on embryonic stem cells that would otherwise be discarded from in vitro fertilization.

- United Church of Christ, Resolutions, “Support for Federally Funded Research on Embryonic Stem Cells”

United Methodist Church

In 2004, the United Methodist Church asserted its support for therapeutic cloning in which spare embryonic stem cells resulting from in vitro fertilization are used. The church also maintained its opposition to the use or creation of embryonic stem cells solely for the purpose of research.

- United Methodist Church, Archives, “Ethics of Embryonic Stem Cell Research”

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Other Resources

Pew Forum

Aug. 3, 2006
Survey: Pragmatic Americans Liberal and Conservative on Social Issues

July 18, 2006
John Green Addresses Religious Dynamic of Stem Cell Politics

Nov. 15, 2002
Theological Perspectives on Biomedical Research

News

June 15, 2008
Bishops Seek Stem Cell Ally in White House
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

May 19, 2008
Hybrid Embryo Research Endorsed
The Washington Post

April 8, 2008
‘Blank’ Stem Cells Showing Promise
The Boston Globe

Other websites

Stem Cell Information Page
(National Institutes of Health)

State Embryonic and Fetal Research Laws (National Conference of State Legislatures)

Key Moments in the Stem-Cell Debate (NPR)