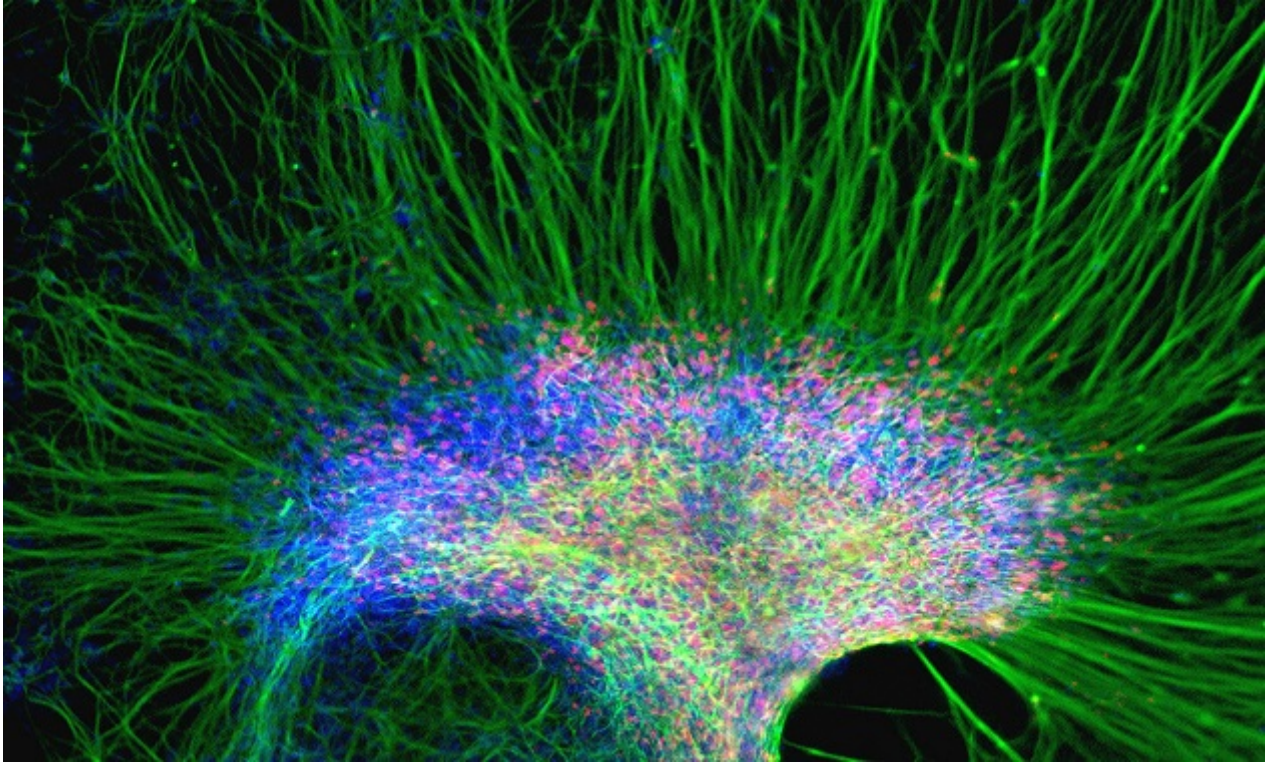


Stem Cell Research: Aspects from the Orthodox Christian Perspective - 2 (Vassilios Fanaras)

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Orthodox Christian perspective

Orthodox Christian theology teaches that human life begins from the very moment of conception. The respect on human life from this point does not allow us to accept: a. the manipulation on human embryos, b. the destruction of supernumerary embryos from In-Vitro Fertilization (I.V.F.), c. the destruction of blastocyst.



The acceptance of the use of embryonic stem cells for research and therapeutic purposes is obviously in contrast with the teaching of Christian ethics, which respect the human foetus from the very moment of conception.[vi] The medical opinion that the use of foetuses up to the 14th day after insemination or conception, for research and experimental purposes is permitted and it is not immoral is also in opposition to Christian ethics. This approach does not regard human foetus as an entity with immortal and eternal prospects, thus having the full rights of a human being. *"Today the human body is approached by medical staff in a mechanistic way. Attention given only to the human body, ignoring the soul and body union, suggests an anthropology that is different to Christian. Christian ethics is focused on the human person. Respect for the human person presupposes respect for the freedom of human existence and the absence of utilitarian practice."* [vii] The same argument is presented when the foetus is treated only, as a *"potential human person"*.

The scepticism, therefore, is not based on a permanently conservative or negative attitude, but on the respect of the human person and the sanctity of human existence. The basic rule of moral behaviour is *"that the human is not the cause of his existence, but he has it on loan"* [viii]. Thus, humans by manipulating the foetus go beyond the limits and play the role of God, any kind of God.

An acceptable Christian ethical confrontation is to respect embryos as human beings and to find other ways to heal the human pain and suffering. On September 2005, I suggested with my paper in a European Conference in Holland that: *"Another concept is the cryo-preservation for 20 years of the umbilical cord of the newborn or blood from the placenta in order that, should a problem arise, the person could receive cells from there for treatment."*[ix]

We respect the fact that as human beings, we have bodies. Therefore, we seek for

healing in a case of illness, but we often tend to forget that these bodies are part of the main Body of Christ, the Church.[x] Thus, we should see the salvation in this eschatological and spiritual perspective. Our bodies are finite with respect to flesh, but eternal in the Body of Christ. The following aspects are significant and acceptable perspectives for our issue: «*Our church honours the value of life as holy mystery even through infirmities, imperfections or serious illnesses, and embraces our suffering fellowmen as brothers and prompts our societies in expedition of love, kindness, sympathy, growth of centres and units of charity. The pain causes the love....The infirmity reveals the culture of ethics and not the theories of modern bioethical rationalism*».[xi]

Conclusively:

1. The Orthodox Church blesses and encourages the medical research for the healing of humans.
2. The destruction of human embryos is not acceptable in any kind of research, treatment and therapy.
3. The treatment of patients through the programmed death of another human existence, as human embryos in stem cell research, does not have the potential to become officially acceptable from an Orthodox Christian ethical point of view.
4. The use of somatic (adult) stem cells in research and therapies would be a welcome alternative choice and ethically acceptable practice.
5. The importance of human life demands a “*spiritual therapy*” that is necessary for each illness.
6. Our bodies are part of the main Body of Christ, the Church. We should accept that our bodies are finite with respect to flesh, but eternal in the Body of Christ.

[vi] Holy Synod of Church of Greece, “About Cloning”, 17th August 2000.

[vii] George Mantzaridis, «Bioethics – the ethics of globalization», *Indiktos*, vol. 14, p. 30.

[viii] Maximus the Confessor, *Patrologia Graeca* 90, 893C.

[ix] Vassilios G. Fanaras, Dr. theol., “Therapeutic Cloning: A dilemma between ethics and healing”, *Bioethica Forum*, No. 46, Sept. 2005, p.15.

[x] 1 Cor.12:27, *"Now you are together the body of Christ, and individually you are members of him."*

[xi] 15.5.2007, Bulletin Press of Holy Synod of Church of Greece *"Relatively to the Opinion of National Committee of Bioethics for the Prenatal and pre-implantation diagnosis and the manipulation of foetus"* http://www.ecclesia.gr/greek/holysynod/holysynod.asp?id=907&what_sub=d_typou

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