

Welcome to the first edition of the *CBI Bioethics Update*! We thought that it would be a good idea to send periodic (about once per month) bioethics updates to those who have shown interest in the institute and to LCMS Pastors in the State of Wisconsin. The *Update* will briefly address bioethics issues of regional or national concern and will give a report on the Concordia Center for Bioethics. My goal is to make these updates readable and informative. If you have any ideas for future issues, please contact me by phone or e-mail.

CBI Bioethics Update will be mostly sent out by e-mail and posted on the web. Others will receive it by regular U.S. Mail. If you get one by regular mail, please call my office or send an e-mail so that we can send it to you electronically from that point forward. Thanks much in advance for doing so!

Update on Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research...

It seems to me that this Presidential election year has been the most hotly contended in recent memory. Numerous issues are thrown around the press without much thought or depth. One of these is the future of human stem cell research. There are about 210 different kinds of cells in our bodies. They all come from very specialized cells called stem cells. For example, a stem cell found in our bone marrow makes all the different kinds of blood cells found in our bodies. From another kind of stem cell comes the various skin cells covering our bodies. Researchers hope to successfully treat incurable diseases like diabetes, Parkinson's, and heart disease by stimulating stem cells to replace lost or damaged cells in our bodies. If found to work (and it will take about 10 more years to find out), stem cells could revolutionize medicine.

Stem cell research sounds wonderful, doesn't it? But there are ethical concerns. It's important to keep in mind that there are two types of stem cells - stem cells found in our bodies right now, called adult stem cells, and stem cells gotten from human embryos, called embryonic stem cells. Using cells from our own bodies to cure diseases really doesn't present an ethical problem, any more than other medical treatments might. However, embryonic stem cell research causes us concern. In order to make and use embryonic stem cells they must be taken from an embryo - from the tissue that would normally form a human fetus. When scientists take stem cells from the embryo, the embryo dies. That is where the problem lies. For those of us who believe that life begins at conception that is a real concern.

Here are a few important points to remember about stem cell research. First, President Bush is the first President to allow federal funds to be spent on embryonic stem cell research. On August 9, 2001, during his first live TV appearance before the American people, he announced that taxpayer money could be spent for research on stem cell lines derived from embryos already destroyed before August 11, 2001. Since that time it has been determined that there are approximately 22 stem cell lines that would be eligible for federal funding using that criterion. Second, embryonic stem cell research supported by private funds is still legal in the U.S. Third, while President Bush and Senator Kerry both support federal funding of adult stem cell research - which currently shows much more promise than research on embryonic stem cells - Senator Kerry is calling for relaxing the rules currently prohibiting federal funding for research on new stem cell lines, essentially allowing unrestricted embryonic stem cell research.

The key issue regarding stem cell research, as with many other ethical dilemmas, is the question: "Should we impose limits on science. Are there limits 'absolutes' beyond which we dare not cross?" As Christians I believe we would agree that the sanctity of life from conception onwards and trust in God's will rather than blind faith in human achievement are two of those limits.

I hope this article clarifies to some extent the issue of embryonic stem cell research as you encounter press reports about this issue. If you would like to hear more detailed information on human embryonic stem cell research, I am available on a limited basis to give presentations before interested groups.

Update on the Concordia Center for Bioethics (Abbreviated CBI)...

I have now been at the Institute for over a year now, stepping into the position vacated by Dr. Richard Eyer's retirement. I am very happy here at Concordia University Wisconsin. My office is located in the Health Services wing. Please feel free to stop in and see me if you are in town! Most of my time is taken up with teaching, writing, giving ethics presentations, serving on various community boards, and doing original research. The continued existence of the CBI is due to the support of a gracious anonymous donor. However, existence is not enough. I would like to reach out and do more by turning the CBI into one of the premier Christian bioethics centers, but I am limited by cost considerations. If you would like to help support the mission (see below) of the Concordia Center for Bioethics, please contact me. I need your help!

CBI Needs: Prayer for Kevin Voss and for the work of the CBI; Portable LCD projector for speaking engagements: \$1500; Secretarial help: \$5000; Necessary office supplies: \$5000;

Bioethics library: \$3000; Update bioethics video: \$5000; Update and print CBI brochure: \$2000; Host annual bioethics conference: \$4000; Website maintenance: \$2000.

You may designate support for any or all of these items. Also, for \$120 you may become a CBI Bioethics Associate Member. Please call for details.

Update on Upcoming Events...

November 2, 2004: Dr. Voss presenting, 10:00 a.m. to 10:45 a.m., Sheboygan Tri-Circuit Pastoral Conference, "The Future of Medicine and Human Embryonic Stem Cell Research," Immanuel Lutheran Church, Sheboygan, WI.

November 12-14, 2004: Lutherans for Life Annual Conference, Holiday Inn Cincinnati Airport, Cincinnati, Ohio.

The purpose of the Concordia Center for Bioethics is to serve Jesus Christ and humanity by bringing the power of the Gospel and guidance from God's Law to help people make decisions compatible with the Christian faith on issues in biology and health care