

Stem Cell Therapy: New Lease on Life?

EVER SINCE MAN lost the awareness of his spiritual being, he has sought the immortality of his physical body, for it has been generally thought that this body is the sole source and sustainer of human consciousness and that when death takes it, death takes all—unless one believes, as some religions teach, that the soul survives the body's dissolution. Understandably, therefore, humans are eager to find an elixir that at least prolongs life, life in the body. For what other life is there? Christ Jesus tells us: I shall give you the water of life. Meaning what?

The New Testament, particularly Revelation, has many terms signifying the same supersensible life "substance," what Rosicrucian Philosophy calls the soul body, which temples the desire body, mind and threefold Spirit or Ego of man, and is the counterpart of the Life Spirit. In other words, enduring life is not of the body, nor can flesh and blood inherit the kingdom. But some humans are intent on trying, even at the cost of life itself.

The new contender for a longer lease on life is stem cell therapy. Geneticists and molecular biologists have known for some time that human life evolves from a plnipotent (also pluripotent, totipotent) primitive (stem) cell, originating from the fusion of the male sperm with the female ovum, that can diversify into any one of the more than 200 tissues found in the human body. The fond hope is that ailing or aging organs can be rejuvenated by injecting stem cells in problem areas to replace the deteriorating or malfunctioning parts. The mechanism by which stem cells differentiate is not known. At present, scientists introduce the cells into the problem area and hope that it will "take" and specialize the healthy cells needed.

Actually, stem cell research is a sophisticated, and most would say more promising, offshoot of the

commercial trafficking in aborted fetuses. In *The New Oxford Review* article of November 2000, Joseph Collison describes a glossy brochure mailed out to medical research labs and college science departments by Open Lines, a fetal tissue "wholesaler" which advertises "fresh fetal tissue harvested and shipped to your specifications where and when you need it." To abortion clinics, Opening Lines invites, "Find out how you can turn your patient's decision into something wonderful."

At least five companies buy and sell fetal body parts in what Canadian newsmagazine *Alberta Report* (Aug. 25, 1999) calls "a vast trade in human tissue from babies that are aborted, and sometimes vivisected [cut up while alive], to satiate the exploding multibillion-dollar biotechnology industry."

The selling of body parts, at both ends of the life spectrum, is big business. A person whose driver's license indicates that he is an "organ donor," writes Patric Riley, a newspaper editor and university lecturer, "should have no doubts on this matter. His cadaver will probably be harvested down to its last useful tissue cell for use in everything from kneecap replacements and cosmetic surgery to the testing and manufacture of new drugs" (*Touchstone*, June, 2001). At current prices, the average body is worth about \$80,000 to the cadaver industry, which finds lucrative uses for the roughly 130 pieces of body tissue that are extracted, sterilized, cut up, and put on the market.

Anatomizing the just-deceased body creates major, in not insuperable, problems for the spirit's concentration during its panoramic retrospection, which, in turn, may necessitate the early return of the Ego to earth to die in infancy and then go to first heaven to receive instruction that substitutes for the experience lost from the previous life. And this practice of anatomical harvesting is but one aspect of what has for some time been called "the culture of death."

According to the Alan Guttmacher Institutes (www.nrlc.org/abortion), an affiliate of Planned Parenthood of America, in the last 25 years, since the passage of *Roe v. Wade*, legitimizing “free choice,” over 38 million abortions have been performed (with a possible 3-6% underreporting), averaging 1 1/2 million abortions a year in the U.S. So there are a lot of spare body parts to be distributed.

While scientists have for some time used human embryos for such research studies, the embryos were those “left over” from fertility treatments, where a number of female ova were collected and fertilized by male sperm in vitro, that is outside the body. These fertilized ova, or nascent embryos, were then frozen until such time that they were to be implanted in the donor mother, or, in some cases, her surrogate. We must assume that the Recording Angels have tracked these contingencies and are not foiled by human efforts to improve on the creative process.

The issue with stem cells is different. While otherwise discarded embryos created for implantation are judged by many as fair material for study, private companies are creating embryos solely for experimental purposes. Researchers for the Jones Institute for Reproductive Medicine in Virginia harvested 162 mature ova from 12 young women and created over 100 embryos, with over 50 developing to five days of age. From 40 human embryos, the researchers were able to obtain three stem cell lines. (*LifeSite News*, October 25, 2000).

In November, 1998 University of Wisconsin scientist James Thomson (*Time*, August 20, 2001) discovered how, by controlling their environment, to enable embryonic cells to continue to divide without turning into the varying specialized cells of normal embryonic growth. He thus could produce an indefinite number of such stem cells for research. When research is done on a human embryo, that embryo is “killed.” This word is used by many people who believe that life begins at conception. The National Right to Life’s home page (above) shows Luke and Mark Borden, two infants who were adopted when they were yet frozen embryos. The caption above their pictures reads: “Which one would you kill?”

Proponents of stem cell research say that the benefits deriving from embryological investigation far outweigh the objections, since a host of improvements or cures (for diabetes, Alzheimer’s, etc.) is held out as the prospect. But Pope John Paul II

weighs in that the “pretext...of assuring a better quality of life...open[s] the door to exploitation and abuse on the part of those who unduly claim an arbitrary and limitless power over the human being.” (*Lifesite News*, June 1, 2001) Testifying before the a U.S. Senate subcommittee on Embryonic Stem Cell Research, Nigel Cameron, Ph.D. questioned “whether we should use members of our own kind, *Homo sapiens sapiens*, in whatever stage of biological existence, for a purpose that is other than the good of the individual concerned; whether we should sanction the use of ourselves, in however early a form, as experimental subjects whose final end is destruction.” The principle of the right to life, whether the human is a single cell one day old or 100 years old, is enshrined in the European Convention on Biomedicine and Human Rights and summarized in a *Washington Post* article: “The creation of human embryos specifically for research that will destroy them is unconscionable.”

Cameron calls the use of celebrities (Nancy Reagan, Christopher Reeves) to advance stem cell research “an attempt to short-circuit the moral assessment of means by a crass assertion of ends.... At the heart of our conception of civilization lies the principle of restraint: that there are things we shall not do, shall never do, even though they may bring us benefit....[S]hall we do evil, that good may come?”

Scholar Michael Novak writes that “this nation began its embryonic existence by declaring that it held to a fundamental truth about a right to life endowed in us by our Creator. The whole world depends on our upholding that principle....the fruit of the tree of knowledge over yonder appears to be very sweet, and we feel sure that if we eat of it, then happy endings fit for a god will result. Those endings have always turned to sulfur on our cheeks.” (The comments of Novak, Cameron and others may be read at the website of The Coalition of Americans for Research Ethics—www.stemcellresearch.org.) Clearly, Novak alludes to what students of the Rosicrucian Teachings know for a fact, that no self-created destiny can be circumvented. Disease and illnesses do not just “happen.” They have teaching, balancing, and spiritually rehabilitating functions. The Ego seeking rebirth has new detours and delays to contend with in its journey toward embodiment. Fortunately, the view from above is clearer than that of some people here below who are led by ignorance and arrogance. □