

FACT SHEET: Embryonic stem cell research and vaccines using fetal tissue

To defend his recent decision on stem cell research, President Bush has compared it to the moral judgment that it may be acceptable to use a vaccine cultured in fetal tissue that ultimately came from induced abortions. The President's analogy is invalid because it blurs together two very different questions arising from the use of fetal tissue in medical research:

1. Should a government agency or private company use tissue from induced abortions for vaccine development or other research? The Catholic bishops have answered in the negative. Such use tends to legitimize abortion as a source of "life-affirming" treatments, and requires collaboration with the abortion industry, which should be avoided. This judgment is reflected in policies governing Catholic health care. See *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services* (4th edition, 2001): "Catholic health care institutions need to be concerned about the danger of scandal in any association with abortion providers" (Directive 45), and "Catholic health care institutions should not make use of human tissue obtained by direct abortions even for research and therapeutic purposes" (Directive 66).
2. If such collaboration with abortion has already taken place, and the only vaccine made available for serious diseases contains material that was cultured in fetal tissue from an abortion, may Catholics -- out of concern for their own health or that of their children or the community -- submit to this vaccine without committing serious sin? Most Catholic moralists have replied in the affirmative. The recipient of the vaccine took no part in decisions to base the vaccine on this morally unacceptable source, but is coping with the results of immoral decisions made by others.

It is invalid to cite moral opinions about question (2) to avoid the moral problem posed by question (1). The federal government is choosing here and now to cooperate with researchers who have destroyed human embryos, and even in some cases to reward them with research grants (since these researchers have the most immediate access to the cell lines thereby created).

Moreover, the link between the government's actions and the destruction of human embryos is even closer here than in the case of vaccine companies using fetal tissue from abortions, because in the present case the taking of human life was done precisely *in order to* provide cells for research (and in some cases precisely to qualify for federal research grants).

If treatments ultimately result from this decision, Catholics will face a new form of question (2): Whether in conscience they can accept such treatments that rely on the destruction of human life. Here the moral dilemma will be even more difficult, because in this case human life was destroyed specifically to obtain these cells for research and treatment. Use of embryonic stem cells in successful treatments will increase the demand for future destruction of embryos to provide an adequate supply of tissue for thousands or millions of patients. That will pose a new and serious moral dilemma for pro-life Americans who suffer from serious diseases.