

# Life Insight

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## *Making Sense of the Stem Cell Debate*

At its general meeting in June, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops adopted a brief and clear statement setting forth the bishops' teaching on moral and public policy dimensions of human embryonic stem cell research (and cloning) entitled *On Embryonic Stem Cell Research*.

Law professor and author Michael Uhlmann had high praise for the document, calling it “*a wonderfully concise and eloquent statement on embryonic stem cell research. When printed out, it comes to barely more than six double-spaced typewritten pages, but within that relatively small compass may be found all of the elements essential to a well-formed Catholic conscience on this important question. Even more remarkably, the statement marshals its argument in a manner that can be grasped by a person of ordinary intelligence.*”

“*Given the complexity of the subject and the continual stream of disinformation propagated by the mainstream media on the question, this is no small accomplishment. The bishops deserve a hearty round of applause for piercing to the heart of the matter in such a thoughtful and accessible fashion.*”

The bishops convincingly refute the three arguments most often raised by promoters of embryonic stem cell (ESC) research to attempt to justify the deliberate destruction of week-old human beings: “(1) any harm done in this case is outweighed by the potential benefits; (2) what is destroyed is not a human life, or at least not a human being with fundamental human rights; and (3) dissecting human embryos for their cells should not be seen as involving a loss of embryonic life.”

Pie-in-the-sky promises of cures from ESC research have distracted many good-hearted people from recognizing what the first argument boils down to: scientists should be permitted to do evil now in the hope that some future good may result. This utilitarian ethic has been the source of tremendous suffering and evil in world history. The intentional destruction of innocent human lives must be resisted. It can never be justified by a hoped for benefit.

The second argument questions whether week-old human embryos are, in fact, human lives and worthy of protection. Some researchers and politicians have resorted to verbal gymnastics to deny the humanity of week-old embryos, but the biological facts are beyond dispute. Each of us began life as a one-celled embryo and progressed to the blastocyst stage before becoming a more fully-developed embryo, then fetus, then infant, toddler, etc. But the more serious question for our society to consider is this: is it morally good or morally evil to deny human rights and protections to particular classes of human beings because they are very young or very old or very vulnerable? The answer should be obvious. And if human rights are not inherent in every human being at every stage of life, then the concept of human rights is meaningless. Those in power can simply vote others off the island.

The final argument defends the destruction of human embryos “left over” from IVF procedures because “they’re going to die anyway.” Ultimately, we all are going to die, but that doesn’t justify killing another human being in the name of science. American law does not permit lethal experimentation on embryos slated for abortion, or on condemned prisoners or terminally ill patients. Furthermore, the agenda of many researchers will not be satisfied by using only “left over” embryos in IVF clinics. Cloning already is being used to create human embryos and human-animal hybrid embryos to meet the interest of some scientists in basic research because the supply of donated human eggs is too small for their research “needs.”

*On Embryonic Stem Cell Research* is available from USCCB Publishing in an attractive, full-color 8-panel brochure format (phone 800-235-8722 or visit [www.usccbpublishing.org](http://www.usccbpublishing.org)) and is posted at [www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic](http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic).

Other new resources for parish and school education are as follows: a 2-page (front/back) bulletin insert by the Pro-Life Secretariat, *Stem Cell Research and Human Cloning: Questions and Answers*. Available from USCCB Publishing, it is also posted at [www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic/stemcell/Q&A](http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/bioethic/stemcell/Q&A)

*BulletinInsert.pdf*. This year's Respect Life Program features a full-length article and full-color pamphlet by Professor Maureen Condic, Ph.D. entitled "Stem Cells and Hope for Patients." Both versions will soon be posted on the Secretariat's website and are available in Spanish as well. The pamphlet can be purchased by calling toll-free 866-582-0943.

Lastly, in consultation with the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, SaintMax Worldwide has produced a new 14-minute video entitled "Stem Cell Research: Finding Cures We Can All Live With." The video presents success stories of patients who have benefited from morally sound "adult" stem cell research and commentary from nationally-recognized experts. It can be purchased through [www.saintmaxworldwide.org](http://www.saintmaxworldwide.org) and from USCCB Publishing.

With these excellent and affordable resources, there is no excuse for ignorance on this critical issue facing our nation.

### ***Planned Parenthood: Let the Charades End!***

Planned Parenthood (PPFA) has been making news lately on several fronts. In fiscal year 2007, the nation's premier abortion provider topped \$1 *BILLION* in revenues (with the help of over \$336 million in taxpayer funding). "Flush with cash" –as the *Wall Street Journal* describes it – Planned Parenthood has embarked on two spending sprees. Its Action Fund plans to pump \$10 million into this year's political campaigns to elect pro-abortion candidates. The election funding should go a long way to ensuring that PPFA continues to get hundreds of millions annually in government handouts.

### ***Extreme Make-Over—Abortion Clinic Edition***

The other Planned Parenthood spending frenzy involves facilities expansion and extreme make-overs – opening glitzy mega-clinics, boutiques in shopping malls, and "rebranding" some of its 882 clinics with a "contemporary, fun and lively look," according to a Planned Parenthood regional executive quoted in the *Wall Street Journal* (Stephanie Simon, "Planned Parenthood Hits Suburbia," June 23, 2008, A1).

*Contemporary? Fun? Lively?* These are words one wouldn't readily associate with the grotesque business of destroying innocent young children. Who are they kidding? Apparently, lots of people, beginning with their customers – more than 3 million last year, one-quarter of whom are teenagers – who are

encouraged to believe that condoms and pills guarantee consequence-free sexual activity. (A word about that myth later.)

The one thing that thrives at Planned Parenthood is business. At a time when abortions are declining in the United States, PPFA is staking out an ever larger market share. In 2005, PPFA staff killed one out of every five children aborted in the U.S. In 2007, PPFA's record of 290,000 abortions amounts to almost 1 out of every 4 abortions committed in the United States. Planned Parenthood is proud of that service, yet, as the president of PPFA's Massachusetts affiliate told the *Wall Street Journal*,

"most people associate Planned Parenthood with abortion ... so 'we're trying to reposition ourselves as caring about their health, about prevention, about a sustainable planet.' Or, as she later put it: 'So much more mainstream.'"

The rebranding through renovation is just as much a charade as PPFA President Cecile Richards' recent statement: "Planned Parenthood has been a trusted health care provider for 90 years and we believe women should always be able to get accurate unbiased information about their health care."

### ***Abortion Providers in South Dakota Now Compelled to Be Truthful!***

A late June decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit has shown us again that Planned Parenthood's idea of "accurate unbiased information" is neither accurate, nor unbiased, nor even informative. Case in point: Telling a woman that an abortion removes products of conception does not inform her of what's involved in the procedure. It's misleading, biased against the child's right to life, and accurate only in the most reductionist sense that we're all "products of conception."

At issue in the Eighth Circuit decision is a 2005 South Dakota informed consent law that contains this scientifically indisputable statement: abortion "terminate[s] the life of a whole, separate, unique, living human being." The law defines human being unremarkably as "an individual living member of the species *Homo sapiens*, including the unborn human being during the entire embryonic and fetal ages from fertilization to full gestation." This is self-evident. Everyone knows that human parents procreate human children and not primitive amoeba-like organisms that mysteriously evolve over nine months into human babies.

But PPFA affiliates in Minnesota and North and South Dakota (PPMNS) immediately challenged the law (*Planned Parenthood v. Rounds*), claiming that it forced doctors to give “ideologically charged, nonscientific and inaccurate messages to their patients” by making them present the “State’s viewpoint on an unsettled medical, philosophical, theological, and scientific issue, that is, whether a fetus is a human being.” Forget that the medical/scientific “viewpoint” on human embryogenesis has been known for nearly two centuries!

The trial court inexplicably entered a preliminary injunction to prevent the law from taking effect, ruling that PPMNS had a “fair chance” of winning on the merits and would suffer “irreparable harm” if the law were to go into force immediately. Distressingly, in late 2006, two members of a three-judge panel of the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the preliminary injunction. It took the full bench of the Eighth Circuit, in an *en banc* review of the panel’s ruling, to stop this lunacy. In its June 27 decision, the Court ruled that

*“while the State cannot compel an individual simply to speak the State’s ideological message, it can use its regulatory authority to require a physician to provide truthful, non-misleading information relevant to a patient’s decision to have an abortion, even if that information might also encourage the patient to choose childbirth over abortion. Therefore, Planned Parenthood cannot succeed on the merits of its claim that [the law] violates a physician’s right not to speak unless it can show that the disclosure is either untruthful, misleading or not relevant to the patient’s decision to have an abortion.”*

The Court concluded that PPMNS’s evidence at the preliminary injunction hearing failed to show that the informed consent requirement was “anything but truthful, non-misleading and relevant to the patient’s decision to have an abortion.” The trial court was also found to have applied a too lenient standard in favor of PPMNS (“fair chance” versus “likelihood” of succeeding on the merits) and, accordingly, the injunction was vacated and the case returned to the trial judge for further proceedings.

Planned Parenthood was, of course, quick to denounce the ruling. It has a long history of resisting commonsense abortion regulations. The question now is what strategy will be less damaging to Planned Parenthood. It could drop the challenge in South Dakota where few abortions are performed anyway so the impact of such a law is small, although the

“defeat” could embolden other states to enact similar laws. Or, what’s more likely, Planned Parenthood will keep fighting the South Dakota informed consent language on “principle” all the way to the Supreme Court. That course could prove a public relations fiasco for the abortion industry.

### ***African American Leaders Ask Planned Parenthood to Stop Targeting Their People***

And speaking of public relations fiascos for Planned Parenthood, June is Abortion Awareness Month in the African American community. Black pastors and other community leaders have been joining forces in recent years to speak out against Planned Parenthood’s “targeting” of Black and minority neighborhoods where almost 80% of Planned Parenthood’s clinics are located. They also object to the government’s supporting Planned Parenthood’s activities to the tune of over \$300 million annually.

Jonah Goldberg recently summarized the abortion toll in the African American community:

*Abortion ends more black lives than heart disease, cancer, accidents, AIDS, and violent crime combined. African Americans constitute little more than 12 percent of the population but have more than a third (37 percent) of abortions. That rate has held relatively constant, though in some regions the numbers are much starker; in Mississippi, black women receive some 72 percent of all abortions, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Nationwide, 512 out of every 1,000 black pregnancies end in an abortion. (“A Dark Past,” June 24, 2008, posted on [www.nationalreview.com](http://www.nationalreview.com)).*

This year’s Respect Life Program includes an article and pamphlet by Bishop Martin D. Holley, “A Reflection on the African American Family and the Culture of Life,” which addresses the impact of abortion on the African American community. Bishop Holley suggests ways to help reinvigorate the traditional pro-life and pro-family values within the Black community, in the face of a modern culture hostile to those values.

### ***More Myths Busted***

Now for a final few words on the Planned Parenthood-propagated myths that condoms and birth control pills are “effective” in preventing pregnancy and STDs. Fact sheets citing studies showing that contraceptive pills and emergency contraceptives are ineffective in reducing unintended pregnancy and abortion rates can be found at [www.usccb.org/](http://www.usccb.org/)

*prolife/issues/contraception/index.shtml* and *www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/contraception/morningafterpill.shtml*. In late June, Princeton University's James Trussell (a leading U.S. advocate of contraception and leading researcher in the field) told the British Pregnancy Advisory Service: ***"The Pill is an outdated method because it does not work well enough. It is very difficult for ordinary women to take a pill every single day."***

Trussell explained that computerized pill packs revealed that over two-thirds of women taking oral contraceptive pills missed at least one pill/month and between 30-50% *missed three pills* during the month.

He added that *"increasing access to emergency contraception would not reduce unintended pregnancies and the resulting abortions, despite a massive Government drive to provide it free to young girls.*

*"It is 'unrealistic' to expect women to take the emergency contraceptive every time they have unprotected sex. ...*

*" 'It [has] not reduced unintended pregnancies in America or anywhere else that has introduced it. There is so much unprotected sex you would have to use so much emergency contraception to make a dent,' he said. 'It is not a magic bullet' "* (Rebecca Smith, *"'Contraceptive Pill is Outdated and Does Not Work Well,' Expert Warns," Telegraph* [www.telegraph.co.uk], June 25, 2008).

Perhaps Professor Trussell should give this speech to Planned Parenthood's *TeenWire* staff. That website continues to mislead teens that there's no substantial risk of becoming pregnant or acquiring an STD while using condoms or the Pill. Last March, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that one in four teen girls had at least one STD. But half of teen girls are not even sexually active. Among girls who are sexually active, 40% have one or more STDs!

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy reports that almost one in three girls who have ever had sex – even one time – have become pregnant (31%). If condoms and pills were as effective as *TeenWire* claims, this high rate of pregnancy would be inexplicable. But they're not. Due to human error, the failure (i.e. pregnancy) rates over 12 months for unmarried, non-cohabiting teens are 13% for pill users and 23% for condom users. Pregnancy rates among cohabiting teens are higher still: over 48% of girls on the Pill will become pregnant in 12 months, as will almost 72% of those using condoms to "prevent" pregnancy.

And that's the marketing genius of Planned Parenthood! Give teens free and low cost contraception (made possible by taxpayer funding) and they'll keep coming back, year after year, for costly STD treatments and abortions.

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