SUBMISSION ON CLONING AND EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

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1. Adult and embryonic stem cells.

There is no moral problem with adult stem cell research, but embryonic stem cell research requires the death of the embryo. In 2002 the Prohibition of Human Cloning Bill passed through the House of Representatives and the Senate with no dissenting votes. Even Natasha Stott Despoja and Kay Patterson were opposed to any moves to create embryos for research. Then in December 2005 the Lockhart Report recommended that Australian law allow the creation of human life for the purposes of medical research. We would need to be certain that the embryo is not human life. Even the Lockhart Report declares that a human embryo is 'something that is able to continue development in an integrated way to become a fetus and a live baby'.[1] This looks like an admission that at conception something human is created. How is it that something was unanimously wrong in 2002 is suddenly right in 2006?

2. The only benefits thus far have come from adult stem cell research.

The Lockhart Review was keen on finding supporting for so-called therapeutic cloning and was happy to draw on the work of Professor Hwang Woo Suk in South Korea. Soon after the Lockhart Report was finalised, it emerged that Professor Hwang's work was fabricated and utterly fraudulent.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* has written of the promise of cures which will, in its estimation, 'end untold suffering', and concluded: 'That promise is the ethical basis for saying therapeutic cloning for stem cell research is useful, principled and necessary. Let it begin.'[2]

The fact of the matter is that all of the medical breakthroughs which have been made recently have come through the use of adult stem cells. Something like 70 human conditions are now treated by adult stem cell technology. As a contrast, embryonic stem cells have proved to be very prone to form cancerous tumours. Embryonic stem cells are much less controllable than adult stem cells, and so potentially much less useful, even if their use were moral. Monique Baldwin, whose doctorate is in neuroscience, has written 'To date embryonic stem cells have not demonstrated any therapeutic benefit to anyone.'[3] This can be contrasted with some 45,000 patients who benefit from adult stem cell transplants every year.[4]

3. We are not to do evil that good may come.

The Lockhart Report argues that the death of the embryo is worth it, in

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[1] Lockhart Report, December 2005, p.98.
[2] *Sydney Morning Herald,* 26 July 2006.
[3] *The Australian*, 20 July 2006.
[4] *The Australian*, 20 July 2006.

order to achieve possible benefits for others. The same kind of philosophy could be applied to unborn children at any stage in the womb or indeed to people who are sick or infirm or aged. There are a whole mixture of motives out there in this debate, but we can never justify killing for the benefit of others. Good science is ethical science. Even the liberal *New York Times* commented on the Hwang fraud: 'The debacle is a reminder that science depends heavily on the honesty of its practitioners.'[5] Claims that in China bodies are being harvested for organs to be bought by others is another reminder that the much despised slippery slope argument in fact possesses an inherent logic. Schoolboys once cut up mice in science laboratories. We dare not allow scientists and drug companies to do the same to human embryos.

Underneath all the hype and the hope, it is the Lockhart Report's contention that human beings should be allowed to be created and destroyed for the sake of other human beings. In 1946-1947 Dr Leo Alexander was involved in the Nuremberg investigation into Nazi war crimes. He examined the medical experiments, and the killing of some 275,000 ‘defectives’, and wondered how such events could have been allowed to happen. He concluded that it started with the widespread acceptance of the attitude that there is such a thing as a life not worthy to be lived. His warning is still compelling some sixty years later: ‘Corrosion begins in microscopic proportions.’[6]

In 1967, as a carefree 17 year-old American girl, Joni Eareckson dived into a shallow pool, broke her neck, and subsequently has lived life as a quadriplegic. She, of all people, one would think, would be keen about embryonic stem cell research. Yet she is opposed to it. Her rejection of such research has a special power to it, because of her own circumstances: 'If we violate a human embryo today, tomorrow we will become callous about the fetus, then the infant, and then people with physical defects. A society that honors life will safeguard the rights of the disadvantaged, the weak, and the small.'[7]

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[5] *New York Times,* 17 December 2005.

[6] cf. *Ethics and Medicine,* 3:2, 1987.

[7] Joni Eareckson Tada, 'The Threat of Biotech' in *Christianity Today,* March 2003.