

Senator Frist's About Face on Stem Cell Not a Pro-life Stance

By Father William Maestri

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When we speak of the “wall of separation” we usually means a separation between state and church, religion and politics. Perhaps we need to erect a new wall between politics and medicine, physicians and politicians. The muddled thinking of Senate majority leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) sure makes one want to build a high wall; perhaps we could have a new Tower of Babel.

It seems that Sen. Frist has become a true politician; that is, he wants to embrace contradictory positions in hopes of pleasing all the electorate all the time. He should consult with Lincoln rather than Rowe—you can't please all the people.

Sen. Frist would seem uniquely qualified to speak with enlightened authority about stem cell research. Before the Senator was a senator he was (is) a physician. (Sometimes it is hard to think that politicians have real jobs before they came to political office.) His medical knowledge should be invaluable in any serious discussion about this complex issue. Sadly, Sen. Frist has decided to be more of a politician (professional candidate in '08) than the leader of a great public debate.

On the floor of the United States Senate, Sen. Frist offered the following: he declared himself to be pro-life. He believes that human life begins at the moment of conception. He went on to further state that all human life must be treated with dignity and shown respect. After saying all these sensible things, Sen. Frist “concluded” that embryonic stem cell research is morally acceptable. The Senator will now support the federal funding (taxpayer' money) of embryonic stem cell research.

Somewhere between being pro-life and pro-embryonic stem cell research the Senator has taken a wrong turn.

How, please tell, can one claim to be pro-life, believe that life begins at conception, and all human life deserves respect, and then conclude it is ethical to *destroy* that human life? To be sure we are in a culture of death, which says the most compassionate care for a patient is to euthanize the patient. By the same “logic,” the way we respect early human life is to destroy that human life.

Let's be clear: it simply does not follow that if (one) believes human life begins at conception that it is ethical to destroy early human life. Again, to favor the destruction of early human life is *NOT* pro-life.

No doubt, Sen. Frist would seek cover in the following: the Senator would favor “only” the destruction of human embryos that already exist as the result of fertility treatments

that are frozen or will be destroyed. Since these embryos are going to be destroyed anyway, why not try to gain some benefit fro hurting humanity?

Such a utilitarian view of human life overlooks one inconvenient detail: human embryos which are frozen as well as those marked for destruction are *still* early human life. We are not pro-life because of the *quality* of that life. We are pro-life because we respect all human life as a gift from God. All human life is sacred, not just that human life which is thawed or not means for destruction.

The desires of those suffering from various diseases for relief are understandable. We can offer real hope for medical progress through adult stem cell research. To date, more than 60 advances have been realized though work with adult stem cells or using stem cells from the placenta. To date, we have realized not a single medical advance using embryonic stem cells.

There is a bill, the Stem Cell Therapeutic Act of 2005, which promotes stem cell research using umbilical cord blood. This is a piece of legislation President Bush should sign. This is a genuine piece of pro-life legislation. If Sen. Frist is pro-life, he will be an ardent supporter of this bill. We can only hope Sen. Frist will follow his stated beliefs to their pro-life conclusions.