



Rachel's Children

Jeremiah 3:15 & Matthew 2:17-18
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Feast of the Holy Innocents

Orthodox Christians for Life Serving Christ and the Holy Orthodox Church: 1986-2002

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Connecting the Dots.....

by Matushka Valerie Protopapas

Who does not recognize the images of September 11th, 2001? Smoke, fire, explosions, bodies falling from windows hundreds of feet above the street, a commercial airliner caught on film and videotape moments before it smashes into a magnificent skyscraper and, finally, huge buildings collapsing in smoke, dust and debris to crush all below who had rushed, not *away*, but *towards* danger in a valiant, albeit vain, effort to help. Yes, these images have been burned into the collective consciousness of people around the world and no where more so than in America, the national victim of these heinous and cowardly attacks.

The result of 9/11 has been far more than our response as a nation to those who launched the attack. It has included a nurturing and caring response to all who were injured and the families of those killed in it as well as a resurgence of expressions of traditional religious faith and patriotism. Members of Congress stood on the steps of the Capital building spontaneously singing "God Bless America". Churches and synagogues were filled with mourners praying for our nation and those who had been killed and injured in the events of that black day. Flags and banners expressing patriotic sentiments began springing up everywhere and suddenly it was no longer considered "gauche" to be a patriotic American, nor was it politically incorrect to mention America and God in the same sentence or to display symbols of faith in conjunction with symbols of national identity. Signs saying "God Bless America" began appearing everywhere - even on public buildings and (wonder of wonder!) schools. Hard core adherents of the much vaunted (and fictional) doctrine of "the separation of church and state", quietly removed themselves into the background, making only occasional (and low profile) appearances in the media to decry the "re-imposition of religion" on American culture. However, in most instances such nay-sayers have been ignored even by their erstwhile friends in the media who are much more attuned to the mind of Americans at this critical time.

In the midst of this outcry to God for His divine protection from those who would kill us and attack our nation, occasionally there have been sentiments expressed which have been virtually ignored except in two cases where such sentiments - and those who uttered them - were vehemently condemned. Southern Baptist preacher Jerry Falwell and prominent Evangelical

minister, Pat Robertson both opined that before Americans set about wondering why God would allow such a catastrophe to happen to our nation, it might be wise to take stock of America's present moral situation. Perhaps, these two gentlemen posited, our outrageous immorality as a nation for the last forty years just might mean that we had forfeited the right to demand God's protection. Well, as one might imagine, such sentiments instantly met with such an outcry of condemnation that both men were forced to "clarify" (i.e. back off) their statements. Rev. Falwell insisted that he did not blame homosexuals for the attack on the Twin Towers while Rev. Robertson was equally profuse in his attempt to quiet the waters of controversy that he had stirred up. Yet, these minor interruptions in our nation's attempt to return to that halcyon era of religious patriotism not seen since the Second World War, were soon forgotten as we marshaled our forces and set about finding and punishing "Those Responsible".

Still, Messers. Falwell and Robertson's sentiments were not entirely rejected. In an interview with media talking head Bryant Gumbel, the daughter of Evangelist Billy Graham was asked (rather officiously) why God would "allow" such a terrible thing to happen to America. That lady quietly pointed out that when a nation "invites God to leave", it can hardly complain about the outcome when He, Gentleman that He is, does so. America has spent the last forty years telling God to get out and 9/11 was a very clear indication that apparently He has done just that. And although, doubtless, He will return if asked, we have no right as a people to complain to Him about what happens when He removes His benevolent protection from our nation.

However, Rev. Graham's daughter was not the only one willing to make a connection between America's atrocious moral state and the most deadly attack upon our nation since Pearl Harbor. Operation Rescue National (ORN) - a pro-life organization which has in the past attempted to enlighten Americans about abortion in the same way as the Civil Rights movement did with segregation in the South - also made this same point, sending out a pamphlet showing two pictures side by side. One was the burning towers of the World Trade Center and the other was the dismembered mutilated body of an aborted baby. Above it they put, "Can you connect the dots?" referring to the puzzles in children's books wherein if one starts drawing a line from the dot numbered "1" and connects all the dots numerically to the last numbered dot, a "hidden" picture appears. It was quite clear to the folks at ORN that the two events pictured on their pamphlet were inextricably

connected - just like the line and dots in the picture. America has abandoned the protection of innocent human life and embraced a culture of selfishness, hedonism and death. As a result (connect the dots...) our nation opened itself to the events of September 11th, 2001. Furthermore, whereas the death toll from 9/11 is now thought to be under three thousand, half again that number die daily in our nation's abortuaries - four thousand five hundred on the average. Even when we believed that over six thousand had died, that only meant that it took one and a half days for America's abortion "clinics" to "9/11" that many American lives.

When Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson pointed out that our nation's moral climate just might have contributed to the events of 9/11, many - especially "religious" - people decried them for even suggesting that God had any part in the terrible events of that day. Yet, we know from history that God has used wicked men to visit punishment on His people when they strayed from The Way. By removing His protective hand from his people Israel, God made possible the chastisement of that erring nation by their Gentile enemies. Furthermore, such national chastisement is not limited to Biblical times. In America's own past, this nation suffered a calamitous civil war as a direct result of the great evil of slavery. Certainly, none can doubt that America has abandoned the moral traditions upon which she was founded and has already paid a terrible price in moral degeneracy for doing so. Perhaps 9/11 was God's way of getting our attention before abandoning us for good. If that is indeed the case, then there will have to be more and greater changes in this nation than just a rash of flag flying and pious bumper stickers. If these changes do not occur, then there are probably going to be a lot more and possibly worse 9/11s in our future.

The following is a very important document:

Statement of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, October 17, 2001

Dearly-beloved in the Lord:

The current debate over research on embryonic stem cells raises in the starkest way a crucial moral question concerning the ultimate meaning and value of human life.

From the perspective of Orthodox Christianity, human life begins at conception (meaning fertilization with creation of the single-cell zygote). This conviction is grounded in the Biblical witness (e.g., Ps 139:13-16; Isaiah 49:1ff; Luke 1:41,44), as well as in the scientifically established fact that from conception there exists genetic uniqueness and cellular differentiation that, if the conceptus is allowed to develop normally, will produce a live human being. (1) Human life is sacred from its very beginning, since from conception it is ensouled existence. As such, it is "personal" existence, created in the image of God and endowed with a sanctity that destines it for eternal life.

Conservative, pro-life voices throughout the country have enthusiastically praised President Bush's recent decision regarding scientific research using human embryonic stem cells (ESCR). That decision would allow research on some sixty lines of existing stem cells, developed from human embryos which were destroyed as the cells were harvested. It would prohibit creation of embryos for research purposes, and it urges further study into the feasibility of utilizing

adult stem cells to achieve the same therapeutic ends envisioned for embryonic stem cells. These limitations, it is argued, would ensure that extra embryos resulting from in vitro fertilization techniques would not be subjected to manipulation by researchers, nor would embryos be created, by cloning or any other means, for the specific purpose of serving as research subjects.

We, the Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, applaud the President's initiative in seeking a reasonable compromise between assuring protection of human life at every stage of its development, and exploring the potential therapeutic benefits to be derived from pluripotent stem cells. We are gratified that he has expressed unambiguous opposition to human cloning. We cannot, however, condone the manipulation of embryonic cells in any form for research purposes, including lines developed from destroyed embryos. Rather, we can only express dismay at the fact that the debate over this issue has avoided major considerations regarding the very meaning and value of human life.

President Bush's proposal to use only the existing sixty lines of stem cells (2) because the embryos had already been destroyed (i.e., killed) falters on the precept enunciated by the apostle Paul in Romans 3:8, "We may not do evil so that good may come." The very act of destroying those embryos is evil, and we may not profit from evil even to achieve a good and noble end.

Although the President's Solomonic decision appears to serve pro-life interests, in fact it unwittingly opens the floodgates to ever more utilitarian manipulation of human life. Research on existing stem cell lines should be prohibited for the simple reason that those embryos should never have been created in the first place. The moral line has been crossed, and Mr. Bush's proposed limitations do little to prevent an inevitable descent down an increasingly slippery slope.

Our opposition to ESCR is based on the following considerations, which are political as well as medical and theological.

In the first place, debate on this issue has too often overlooked the fact that among the most vocal proponents of embryo research are pro-abortion activists, supported by much of the media. If the government refuses to fund such research, it would thereby tacitly acknowledge that human life begins at conception. This flies in the face of abortion legislation such as Roe v. Wade and would inevitably undermine the view that an embryo is merely a clump of tissue and can therefore be aborted on demand with no moral consequences. The real issue underlying the debate, then, is less the development of potential therapies than the preservation of so-called "abortion rights." (3)

Second, enormous pressures to legalize and federally fund embryonic stem cell research is coming from the biotech and pharmaceutical industries, because of the promise of nearly limitless profits. The "new medicine" based on stem cell therapies is largely driven by the marketplace. As with AIDS medications and other recently developed therapies, market forces will determine who has access to them, and at what cost.

Third, it should be noted that in the recent past (1992) scientists were touting the exceptional benefits of fetal tissue, particularly in the treatment of illnesses such as Parkinson's disease. To date, such therapies have been a disappointment. Some Parkinson's patients, in fact, have suffered irreversible damage due to the introduction of foreign cells into their brains. And no new medicines of significance have been produced using fetal cells. Claims that embryonic stem cells will produce a panacea are likely to be equally exaggerated.

Fourth, the slippery slope of ESCR is dangerous and potentially

irreversible. Already an Australian company, in November 2000, received a patent to create chimeras: animals with body tissue and organs produced using human stem cells. And in February 2001, a team of San Francisco researchers announced that they had created a strain of mice, one quarter of whose brains were composed of human cells. In just thirty years the utilitarian slope has taken us from legalized abortion to partial-birth abortion, to physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia, in addition to acceptance of fetal tissue therapy and destruction of embryos to harvest stem cells. Unless moral persuasion can reverse the trend, the slope will lead to a tragic devaluation of human life.

Fifth, ever since the Holocaust the principle has been universally accepted by the scientific community that no experimentation should be undertaken on human subjects without the subject's informed consent. Obviously, such consent cannot be granted by an embryo (nor, by the way, by a two-year old). Neither the mother nor anyone else has "proxy" rights in this regard over the life and well-being of a Child in utero or in vitro.

Sixth, ESCR relies on cloning to produce multiple copies of the cells under investigation. Cloning in animal experiments has a failure rate on the order of 95%, and mice and other animals produced through cloning have been born with serious genetic defects. The cloning of human embryos for research purposes presents similar dangers, and for this reason alone it should be permanently banned.

Finally, it has been proved recently that adult stem cells, together with those harvested from placentas and umbilical cords, hold as much if not more promise than embryonic stem cells. In May, 2001, the prestigious scientific journal Cell published a report showing that adult bone marrow cells have an extraordinary capacity to differentiate into epithelial cells of the liver, lung, GI tract and skin. The report noted that "This finding may contribute to clinical treatment of genetic disease or tissue repair."(4) In August, 2001, researchers reported finding adult stem cells in mouse brains that were used to produce muscle cells; and a Canadian team isolated "versatile" (pluripotent) cells in mice that produced neural, muscle and fat cells. This means that in the relatively near future it should be possible to harvest stem cells from a patient's skin, multiply them by cloning, and use them for therapeutic purposes, including the growing of new organs.

In conclusion, we firmly reject any and all manipulation of human embryos for research purposes as inherently immoral and a fundamental violation of human life. We call upon the President and the Congress of the United States to restore and maintain a total ban on ESCR. Furthermore, we encourage the scientific community to reject pressures for ESCR exerted by the pro-abortionist lobby, the biotech and pharmaceutical industries, and to devote their energies

and resources to discovering, harvesting and utilizing non-embryonic stem cells, including those derived from adults, placentas and umbilical cords.

Above all, we urge our faithful, together with the medical community and political leaders, to return to the spirit of the Hippocratic Oath: primum non nocere, "First of all, do no harm." Embryonic stem cell research results in unmitigated harm. It should be unequivocally rejected in the interests of preserving both the sacredness and the dignity of the human person.

With love in the Lord, the Source of Life,

+THEODOSIUS, Archbishop of Washington
Metropolitan of All America and Canada

And the members of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America:

- +KYRILL, Archbishop of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania
- +PETER, Archbishop of New York and New Jersey
- +DMITRI, Archbishop of Dallas and the South
- +HERMAN, Archbishop of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania
- +NATHANIEL, Archbishop of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate
- +JOB, Bishop of Chicago and the Midwest
- +TIKHON, Bishop of San Francisco and the West
- +SERAPHIM, Bishop of Ottawa and Canada
- +NIKOLAI, Bishop of Baltimore

1. J. Breck, The Sacred Gift of Life (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998), chp. 2, "Procreation and the Beginning of Life," pp. 127ff.
2. According to numerous reports, this figure is exaggerated. There may exist throughout the world today only some thirty lines that can prove useful for research purposes. As a result, many scientists are calling for expanding these proposed limitations or for dropping them altogether.
3. This same motivation explains the proliferation of terms to specify discrete stages of life growing in the womb: pre-embryo, embryo, fetus. The reality is that at every stage from conception to birth it is a matter of a human child. Its life is no more "potential" or less human at these stages than is the life of a newborn, a two-year old or an octogenarian.
4. The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly vol. 1, no. 3 (2001), 443.

Orthodox Christians for Life - National Organization

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To all the Orthodox Christian Faithful,

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS FOR LIFE

*Requests the honor of your presence for
The Orthodox Witness on the Sanctity of Human Life at the*

YEAR 2002 MARCH FOR LIFE

mourning the legalization of abortion in 1973

Tuesday, January 22, 2002

11:30AM, (Rain, Snow, or Shine)

We start to assemble at 11:00AM

Look for the large white banner with blue lettering

-the exact location of the banner is uncertain at this time-

Program Activities Start at 12:00 noon at

The Washington Monument, Washington DC

(Please Note the Change)

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