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Statement of the Holy Synod of Bishops on Embryonic Stem Cell Research

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October 17, 2001

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Syosset, NY—Members of the Holy Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church in America, meeting at the Chancery of the Orthodox Church in America here October 15-18, 2001, issued a statement titled “Embryonic Stem Cell Research in the Perspective of Orthodox Christianity.”

The statement affirms the Orthodox Christian conviction that “human life begins at conception [and that] 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.”

While applauding the US 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” and in expressing “unambiguous opposition to human cloning,” the hierarchs state that they “cannot condone the manipulation of embryonic cells in any form for research purposes, including lives developed from destroyed embryos.”

The statement offers six points that must be considered in assessing the political, medical and theological ramifications of embryonic stem cell research and calls upon President Bush and the US Congress “to restore and maintain a total ban” on embryonic stem cell research as “inherently immoral and a fundamental violation of human life.”

“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,.’” the statement

concludes. “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.”

In addition to His Beatitude, Metropolitan Theodosius, Primate of the Orthodox Church in America, the statement was signed by all other members of the Holy Synod of Bishops, including His Eminence, Archbishop Kyrill of Pittsburgh and Western Pennsylvania; His Eminence, Archbishop Peter of New York and New Jersey; His Eminence, Archbishop Dmitri of Dallas and the South; His Eminence, Archbishop Herman of Philadelphia and Eastern Pennsylvania; His Eminence, Archbishop Nathaniel of Detroit and the Romanian Episcopate; His Grace, Bishop Job of Chicago and the Midwest; His Grace, Bishop Tikhon of San Francisco and the West; His Grace, Bishop Seraphim of Ottawa and Canada; and His Grace, Bishop Nikolai of Baltimore.

The full text of the statement may be found on the web site of the Orthodox Church in America at [Statement on Embryonic Stem Cell Research](#) and will appear in the October/November issue of “The Orthodox Church” newspaper.