

On the place of the human embryo within the Christian tradition and the theological principles for evaluating its moral status ¹

Submitted to the House of Lords Select Committee on Stem Cell Research by an *ad hoc* group of Christian theologians from the Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox and Reformed traditions*

Basis of this submission

1. In a multi-cultural and multi-religious society, it is appropriate to take account not only of secular arguments concerning the place of the human embryo but also of arguments expressed in the religious language of some sections of the community. It is particularly important to understand the *Christian* tradition in this regard because of the place Christianity has had in shaping the moral understanding of many citizens in this country, and because this tradition has already been invoked in the context of public debate.¹

2. The Human Fertilisation and Embryology (Research Purposes) Regulations 2001 greatly expand the purposes for which research using human embryos can take place, and thus, if implemented, will inevitably lead to a massive increase in the use and destruction of embryos. The Select Committee has expressed its wish not 'to review the underlying basis of the 1990 Act';² however, the ethical and legal issues surrounding 'the Regulations as they now stand' *cannot* adequately be addressed without considering the moral status of the human embryo. Similarly, the 'regulatory framework established by the 1990 Act' *cannot* operate effectively if it is flawed in principle.

3. Adding more purposes for which human embryos can be created for destructive use builds upon a mistake that has already been made in the existing legislation. By far the most important ethical issue involved in the Regulations 'as they now stand' relates to the ethical significance of embryonic human individuals whether produced by cloning or by the ordinary process of fertilization. The spectacle of thousands of stock-piled frozen human embryos being destroyed at the behest of this legislation bore witness that, even in the area of fertility treatment, too little consideration had been given to regulating the initial production of human embryos, as opposed to their subsequent disposal. The Regulations 2001 make the situation even worse in this regard.

The Christian tradition

4. Some scholars, considering the prospective benefits to be derived from experimenting on human embryos, have alleged that the Christian tradition had already set a precedent for treating the early human embryo with 'graded status and protection'.³ In support of this it has been noted that there were seventh century books of penance ('Penitentials') which graded the level of penance for abortion according to whether the foetus was 'formed' or

¹ Hansard Vol.62 1, No.16, col.35.37.

² In its 'Call for Evidence'.

³ Cf. G. R. Dunstan 'The Human Embryo in the Western Moral Tradition' in G.R. Dunstan and M.J. Sellers *The Status of the Human Embryo* London: King Edward's Hospital Fund, 1988, p. 55.

'unformed'. The same distinction was invoked in Roman Catholic canon law which, from 1591 to 1869, imposed excommunication only for the abortion of a 'formed' foetus. Furthermore, St Thomas Aquinas, one of the most authoritative theologians of the Middle Ages, explicitly held that the human embryo did not possess a spiritual soul and was not a human being (*homo*) until forty days in the case of males or ninety in the case of females.⁴ Texts from the Fathers of the Church could easily be found to support a similar conclusion.

5. Nevertheless, the contention that for most of Christian history (until 1869) the human embryo has been considered to possess only a relative value - such as might be outweighed by considerations of the general good - relies on a misreading of the tradition. Even in the Middle Ages, when most Western Christians held that the early embryo was not yet fully human, it was held that the human embryo should never be attacked deliberately, however extreme the circumstances. To gain the proper historical perspective it is necessary to supply a wider context by incorporating other elements of that tradition.

6. The earliest Christian writings on the issue declared simply, 'you shall not murder a child by abortion'⁵: the embryo was held to be inviolable at every stage of its existence.⁶ The first Christian writings to consider the question of when human life began asserted that the spiritual soul was

present from conception.⁷ As one account puts it: 'The Early Church adopted a critical attitude to the widespread practice of abortion and infanticide. It did so on the basis of a belief in the sanctity of human life; a belief which was in turn an expression of its faith in the goodness of creation and of God's particular care for humankind.'⁸

7. The earliest Church legislation also contains no reference to the distinction of formed and unformed,⁹ and St Basil the Great, who did consider it, saw it as a sophistical exercise in splitting hairs: 'We do not consider the fine distinction between formed and unformed.'¹⁰

8. In the fourth and fifth centuries some theologians argued that human life began at conception,¹¹ some held that the spiritual soul was 'infused' at

⁷ St Clement *Prophetic Eclogues* 41, 48-49, cf. M.J. Gorman *Abortion and the Early Church: Christian, Jewish & Pagan Attitudes in the Greco-Roman World* Dovers Grove Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1982, p. 52; Tertullian *On the Soul* 27. 'Now we allow that life begins with conception, because we contend that the soul also begins from conception; life taking its commencement at the same moment and place that the soul does.'

⁸ 'Some Current Ethical Issues Concerning the Treatment of the Pre-Implantation Human Embryo', a briefing paper prepared by the General Synod Board for Social Responsibility; cf. G. Bonner, 'Abortion and Early Christian Thought' in J.H. Channer ed. *Abortion and the Sanctity of Human Life*, Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1985; M.J. Gorman; L. Crutchfield 'The Early Church Fathers and Abortion' at <http://www.all.org/issues/ab99x.htm>.

⁹ Elvira (305 CE) canons 53, 65; Ancyra (314 CE) 21; Lerida (524 CE) 2; Braga (527 CE) 77; Trullo (692 CE) 91; Mainz (847 CE) 21; cf. S. Troianos 'The Embryo in Byzantine Canon Law'.

¹⁰ Basil *Epistle* 118.2.

¹¹ St Gregory of Nyssa *On the Making of Man* 29; cf. St Maximus the Confessor *II Ambigua* 42.

⁴ *Commentary on the Sentences* book IV, d. 31 exp. text.

⁵ *Didache* 2.2; *Epistle of Barnabas* 19.5.

⁶ See also *Apocalypse of Peter* 2.26; St Clement of Alexandria *Teacher* II.10.96; Athenagoras *Legatio* 35; Municius Felix *Octavius* 30.2; Tertullian *Apology* 9.4-8; Hippolytus *Refutation of All Heresies* 9.7.

forty days or so¹² (following Aristotle)¹³ and some held that the timing of the infusion of the soul was a mystery known to God alone.¹⁴ However, whatever their views about the precise moment when human life began, all Christians held that abortion was gravely wrong,¹⁵ an offence against God the Creator and either the killing of a child, or something very like the killing of a child. If it was not regarded as homicide in the strict sense, 'it was looked upon as anticipated homicide, or interpretive homicide, or homicide in intent, because it involved the destruction of a future man. It was always closely related to homicide.'¹⁶

9. In the Anglo Saxon and Celtic 'Penitentials' (from the seventh century) and in the canon law of the Latin Church (from the eleventh century) abortion of a formed foetus sometimes carried heavier penalties than did abortion of an unformed foetus. Yet canon law has an eye not just on objective harm done but also on subjective culpability and on enforceability. The decision of

Gregory XIV in 1591 to limit the penalty of excommunication to the abortion of a formed foetus was expressly due to problems enforcing earlier legislation.¹⁷ Abortion of an unformed foetus was sometimes regarded as, technically, a different sin - and sometimes (though not universally) as a lesser sin - than abortion of a formed foetus, but it continued to be regarded as a grave sin closely akin to homicide.

10. From the twelfth century until the seventeenth century, convinced by the anatomy of Galen and the philosophy of Aristotle, most Christians in the West came to believe that the spiritual soul was infused forty days or so after conception. Nevertheless, during this whole period, there was no suggestion that the unformed foetus was expendable. The unformed foetus continued to be regarded as sacrosanct. It was *never* seen as legitimate to harm the embryo directly, only incidentally, and only then in the course of trying to save the mother's life.¹⁸

11. The first theologian to suggest explicitly that the embryo had a graded moral status, that is, a relative value that could be outweighed by other values, was Thomas Sanchez in the late sixteenth century.¹⁹ He and other 'laxists' proposed that a woman could legitimately abort an unformed foetus to avoid public shame of a kind which might endanger her life. This suggestion constituted a radical departure from the thinking of previous moralists such as St Raymond of Penafort or St Antoninus of Florence and provoked the criticism of

¹² Lactantius *De Opificio Dei* 12; Ambrosiaster *QQ Veteris et Novi Testamenti* 23.

¹³ *On the History of Animals* VII.3, 4:583.

¹⁴ St Jerome *On Ecclesiastes* 2.5; *Apologia adversus Rufinum* 2.8; St Augustine *Enchiridion* 85, *On Exodus* 2.80; though each of these sometimes state that the foetus is not a man (*homo*) until he is fully formed.

¹⁵ St Augustine *On Marriage and Concupiscence* 1.15; St Ambrose *Hexameron* 5.18; St Jerome *Epistle* 22, 13; St John Chrysostom *Homily 24 on the Epistle to the Romans*; Caesarius of Arles *Sermons* 9, 91.

¹⁶ J. Connery *Abortion: The Development of the Roman Catholic Perspective*, Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1977, p. 306, cf. G. Grisez, *Abortion: the Myths the Realities and the Arguments*, New York: Corpus Books, 1970; J.T. Noonan 'An Almost Absolute Value in History' in J.T. Noonan ed. *The Morality of Abortion: Legal and Historical Perspectives* Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970.

¹⁷ Bull of 1591, *Sedes Apostolica* cf. Connery p. 148; Grisez pp. 167-168; Noonan p. 33.

¹⁸ Connery pp.114-134; Grisez pp. 166-168; Noonan pp. 26-27.

¹⁹ Connery pp. 134-141; Grisez pp. 168-169; Noonan pp. 27-31.

Sanchez's contemporaries, the scandal of the faithful and, in 1679, the condemnation of Pope Innocent XI.²⁰

12. Between this discredited school of the seventeenth century and the re-emergence of similar views in the late twentieth century, there is no significant or continuous strand of Christian tradition - either in the Catholic or the Reformed churches. The most balanced and representative Catholic moralist of the eighteenth century, St Alphonsus Liguori, allowed no exception to the prohibition on 'direct' (intentional) abortion and allowed 'indirect' (unintentional) abortion only in the context of attempting to save the mother's life. In a statement reminiscent of St Basil he declared that the distinction of formed and unformed made no practical difference.²¹ He is the last great moralist to consider the inviolability of the 'unformed' foetus as such, because, during his time, the prevailing medical opinion moved away from the distinction between formed and unformed. In his later writing (on baptism) St Alphonsus also became sympathetic to the view that the spiritual soul was infused at conception.²²

13. From the seventeenth century the classical biology of Galen and Aristotle had begun to be displaced by a variety of other theories. One, in particular, gave a more equal role to the female and male elements in generation, and therefore increased the significance of 'fertilization', that is,

the moment of the union of male and female gametes.²³ This theory was finally confirmed in 1827 with the first observation of a mammalian ovum under the microscope, a scientific development which informed the decision of Pius IX in 1869 to abolish the distinction in legal penalties between early and late abortions. By the mid-nineteenth century the prevailing opinion, among both Reformed and Roman Catholic Christians, was that, most probably, the spiritual soul was infused at conception.²⁴

14. In asserting that 'life must be protected with the utmost care from conception'²⁵ and rejecting 'the killing of a life already conceived',²⁶ twentieth century Christians were in continuity with the belief of the Early Church that all human life is sacred from conception. This had remained a *constant* feature of Christian tradition despite a variety of beliefs about the origin of the soul and a similar variety

²³ The theory developed by Fienus (1567-1631), Zacchia (1584-1659) and Cangiamila (1701-1763) cf. Connery ch. 10-11; Grisez pp. 170-172; Noonan pp. 34-40.

²⁴ This has also become the prevailing opinion among followers of St Thomas Aquinas, cf. B. Ashley 'A Critique of the Theory of Delayed Hominization' in D. McCarthy and A. Moraczewski *Evaluation of Fetal Experimentation: An Interdisciplinary Study* St Louis: Pope John Center, 1976; B. Ashley and A. Moraczewski 'Cloning, Aquinas, and the Embryonic Person' *The National Catholic Bioethics Quarterly* 1 (2000), 189-201; S. Heaney, 'Aquinas and the Presence of the Human Rational Soul in the Early Embryo' *The Thomist* 56, (1992) 1; M. Johnston 'Delayed Hominization' *Theological Studies* 56 (1995); R. Joyce 'The Human Zygote Is a Person' *The New Scholasticism* 51 (1975).

²⁵ Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et Spes* 51.

²⁶ Lambeth Conference 1958 report 'The Family in Contemporary Society' in *What the Bishops Have Said about Marriage* London: SPCK, 1968, p. 17.

²⁰ Denzinger-Schoenmetzer *Enchiridion Symbolorum* Rome: Herder, 1965, 2134-2135 cf. Connery p. 189; Grisez p. 174; Noonan p. 34.

²¹ *Theologia Moralis* III, 4.1, n. 394.

²² *Theologia Moralis* VI, 1.1, dubia 4, n. 124 cf. Connery p. 210; Grisez p. 176; Noonan p. 31.

in what legal penalties were thought appropriate for early or late abortion.²⁷

15. In the tradition, the only precedents for attributing a 'graded status and protection' to the embryo can be found in the speculations of some of the Roman Catholic laxists of the seventeenth century and the re-emergence of similar and even more radical views among some Protestant and Roman Catholic writers in the late twentieth century.²⁸ The great weight of the tradition, East and West, Orthodox, Catholic and Reformed, from the apostolic age until the twentieth century, is firmly against any sacrifice or destructive use of the early human embryo save, perhaps, 'at the dictate of strict and undeniable medical necessity';²⁹ that is, in the context of seeking to save the mother's life.

Some theological principles

16. For a Christian, the question of the status of the human embryo is directly related to the mystery of creation. In the context of the creation of things

'seen and unseen'³⁰ the human being appears as the *microcosm*, reflecting in the unity of a single creature both spiritual and corporeal realities.³¹ The beginning of each human being is therefore a reflection of the coming to be of the world as a whole. It reveals the creative act of God bringing about the reality of *this* person (of me), in an analogous way to the creation of the entire cosmos. There is a mystery involved in the existence of each person.

17. Often in the Scriptures the forming of the child in the womb is described in ways that echo the formation of Adam from the dust of the earth.³² This is why Psalm 139 describes the child in the womb as being formed 'in the depths of the earth'.³³ The formation of the human embryo is archetypal of the mysterious works of God.³⁴ A passage that is significant for uncovering the connections between Genesis and embryogenesis is found in the deuterocanonical book of Maccabees, in a mother's speech to her son:

I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you. Therefore the Creator of the world, who shaped the beginning of man and devised the origin of all things, will in his mercy give life and breath back to you again.³⁵

²⁷ The Church has always held in regard to the morality of abortion that it is a serious sin to destroy a fetus at any stage of development. However, as a *juridical norm* in the determination of penalties against abortion, the Church at various times did accept the distinction between a *formed* and a *non-formed*, an *animated* and a *non-animated* fetus.' R. J. Huser *The Crime of Abortion in Canon Law* Washington D.C.: Catholic Univ. Press, 1942, preliminary note.

²⁸ An ill-tempered but perceptive critique of some recent attempts to reread the Christian tradition on abortion as 'relatively tolerant' to abortion of an unformed foetus is D. DeMarco 'The Roman Catholic Church and Abortion: An Historical Perspective' in *Homiletic & Pastoral Review* July 1984, 59-66 and August-September, 68-76; cf. <http://www.petersnet.net/research/retrieve.cfm?RecNum=3362>

²⁹ Lambeth Conference 1958 report 'The Family in Contemporary Society' in *What the Bishops Have Said about Marriage* London: SPCK, 1968, p. 17.

³⁰ Creed of Nicaea, N. Tanner *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* London: Sheed & Ward, 1990, I. p. 5.

³¹ Gregory of Nyssa *On the Making of Man*; John Damascene *Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* II.12; Creed of Lateran IV, Tanner p. 230.

³² Job 10.8-12, Ecclesiastes 11.5, Ezekiel 37.7-10, (cf. Wisdom 7.1, 15.10-11).

³³ Psalm 139.15.

³⁴ Psalm 139.15, Ecclesiastes 11.5.

³⁵ II Maccabees 7.22-23.

18. The book of Genesis marks out human beings from other creatures. Only human beings - male and female - are described as being made in 'the image and likeness of God'; only they are given dominion over creation; only Adam is portrayed as receiving life from God's breath and as naming the animals.³⁶ However, at the same time, it is clear that human beings are earthly creatures, made on the same day as other land animals, made from the dust of the earth, not descending out of heaven. Because they are earthly, human beings are mortal: 'Dust you are and to dust you will return'.³⁷ There is no sign in these stories of the dualism of body and soul that is found in Pythagoras or in the ancient mystery religions. The soul is not a splinter of God that is trapped in a body. The soul is the natural life of the body, given by the life-giving God.

19. It was because of the Jewish conviction of the unity of the human being that, when hope was kindled within Israel for a life beyond the grave, it was expressed as a hope for the resurrection of the *body*.³⁸ The disembodied life of the shades in the gloomy underworld of Sheol³⁹ was not an image of hope but an image of death. The resurrection of the body was presented as the triumph of the Lord over death, the vindication of those who had been faithful to the Lord, even unto death,⁴⁰ and for Christians was given new meaning and foundation in the resurrection of Jesus.⁴¹ The story of the empty tomb

and the description of the resurrection appearances emphasized the bodily reality of the life of the resurrection. Jesus walked with the disciples and ate with them and invited them to touch his hands and his feet. 'Handle me and see that I am no bodiless phantom.'⁴²

20. The Fathers of the Church attempted to do justice to the scriptural truths of the bodily resurrection and of the mysterious parallel between the origin of each human individual and the origin of the entire cosmos. From different competing beliefs, the doctrine which prevailed was that the spiritual *soul* - what makes each individual human person unique, and gives each one the ability to know and to love - is neither generated by the parents nor does it pre-exist the body, but it is created directly by God with the coming to be of each human being.⁴³ Throughout the history of the Church, Christians have used the language of 'body and soul' to understand the human being, but in such a way as not to deny the unity of God's creation. In the fourteenth century, in an attempt to defend this human unity, the Ecumenical Council of Vienne defined the doctrine that the soul was 'the form of the body' (*forma corporis*),⁴⁴ by which it meant: what gives life to the body. Christians held, and continue to hold, that the spiritual soul is present from the moment there is a living human body⁴⁵ until the time that body dies.

³⁶ Genesis 1.26-28; 2.7; 2.19-20.

³⁷ Genesis 3.19.

³⁸ Daniel 12.2-3; cf. Ezekiel 37.1-14; John 11.24.

³⁹ Job 10.21-22; Psalms 6.5, 88.10, 115.17; Ecclesiastes 9.3-6 cf. Homer *Odyssey* XI. 485-491.

⁴⁰ Isaiah 26.19; Hosea 13.14; (cf. II Maccabees 7.9-14).

⁴¹ John 11.1-44.

⁴² Ignatius of Antioch *Smyrneans* 3 cf. Luke 24:13-51; John 20.19-29.

⁴³ John Damascene, Peter Lombard, St Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* Ia Q. 118 art.2-3; Pius XII *Humani Generis*.

⁴⁴ Council of Vienne, *On the Catholic Faith*, Tanner p. 361.

⁴⁵ The debate about the timing of the 'infusion of the soul' was a debate about when the living human body came into existence.

21. The Scriptures also emphasize how God's provident care for each person is present before he or she is ever aware of it. The Lord called his prophets by name before they were born: 'The Lord called me from the womb, from the body of my mother he named my name.'⁴⁶ 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you.'⁴⁷ It is possible to understand these passages as referring not only to the prophets, but to each one of God's children. The Lord calls each one from the womb, forms each one, gives each one into the care of his or her mother, and will not abandon his creature in times of trial.⁴⁸

For it was you who created my being, knit me together in my mother's womb. I thank you for the wonder of my being, for the wonders of all your creation.

Already you knew my soul my body held no secret from you when I was being fashioned in secret and moulded in the depths of the earth.⁴⁹

22. Such passages do not establish *when* human life begins, but they establish God's involvement and care from the very *beginning*, a concern that is not diminished by our lack of awareness of him.

23. 'In reality it is only in the mystery of the Word made flesh that the mystery of the human being truly becomes clear.'⁵⁰ To illuminate the mystery of the origin of human persons it seems reasonable to turn to the mystery of the Incarnation. In order to

do justice to the infancy narratives, especially that of the Gospel of Luke, one must believe that, from the moment of the Annunciation to Mary of Jesus's birth, Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit and carried the Saviour in her womb. This is emphasized by the story of the Visitation - where one pregnant mother greets another, and the unborn John bears witness to the unborn Jesus.

24. The Incarnation was revealed to the world at the Nativity when Jesus was born, but the Incarnation *began* at the Annunciation, when the Word took flesh and came to dwell within the womb of the Virgin. This understanding of the text of Scripture is confirmed by the witness of the Fathers of the Church,⁵¹ by the development of the feast of the Annunciation and, not least, by the solemn declaration of the Fourth Ecumenical Council, the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE):

We profess the holy Virgin to be Mother of God, for God the Word became flesh and was made man and from the moment of conception (*ex auteis teis sulleipseoes / ex ipso conceptu*) united himself to the temple he had taken from her.⁵²

25. In the Eastern Church, St Maximus the Confessor turned to the Annunciation⁵³ to illuminate the intractable problem of when human life begins. Jesus is said to have been like to us in all things but sin⁵⁴ and Christians believe that Jesus was a human being from the moment of conception: therefore, it seems, every

⁴⁶ Isaiah 49.1.

⁴⁷ Jeremiah 1.5.

⁴⁸ Psalm 22.10-11; Psalm 71.6; Job 10.8-12.

⁴⁹ Psalm 139.

⁵⁰ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes* 22.

⁵¹ J. Saward *The Redeemer in the Womb* San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993, ch. 3.

⁵² Epistle of St Cyril to John of Antioch, Tanner p. 70.

⁵³ *II Ambigua* 42.

⁵⁴ Hebrews 4.15.

human being must come into existence at the moment of conception.

26. In the West, Christians were more strongly influenced by the biology of Galen and the philosophy of Aristotle and held that the spiritual soul was only infused at the moment when the body was perfectly formed, forty days after conception. The great medieval Christian thinkers all held that the conception of Jesus was an exception, and that he was *unlike* us in the womb.⁵⁵ This was an unhappy conclusion, forced upon theologians by an erroneous biology. Is it really sustainable to argue that Jesus was unlike us in his humanity? A more adequate vision was supplied by the seventeenth century Anglican theologian Lancelot Andrewes, in a sermon on the Nativity:

For our conception being the root as it were, the very ground sill of our nature; that he might go to the root and repair our nature from the very foundation, thither he went.⁵⁶

27. The words of this sermon bring our attention, not only to the work of the Redeemer from the beginning of his life, but also to our need for redemption from beginning of our lives. It was this need that David recognized in himself according to the psalm, 'Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me,'⁵⁷ where these words refer not to his mother's sinfulness, but to the complete extent of his own sinfulness. This psalm and the Eden story were given a deeper sense by Christians in light of the redemption accomplished by Jesus. As Jesus had achieved a total transformation, so all

human beings were in need of a total transformation: total in the sense of including their very origins. In his letter to the Romans, St Paul drew out the parallel between Adam and Christ and so asserted the involvement of all human beings in Adam's sin.⁵⁸

28. This association of sin and conception is also shown within the Roman Catholic tradition in the development of the doctrine of Mary's complete redemption from sin. The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception appears to imply that Mary was receptive to grace from the moment of her conception in her mother's womb. This Roman Catholic argument is simply an expression of a more widely accepted argument from the Christian doctrine of original sin. Both arguments express the general truth that each and every human being needs the help of God from the very first - which is constantly and, it seems, inevitably expressed as 'from the first moment of his or her conception'.

29. The Christian churches teach not that the early embryo is certainly a person, but that the embryo should always be treated *as if* it were a person.⁵⁹ This is not only a case of giving the embryo the benefit of the doubt - refraining from what might be the killing of an innocent person. It is also that the ambiguity in the appearance of the embryo has never been thought of as taking the embryo out of the realm of the human, the God-made and the holy. When Pope John Paul II asks, 'how can a human individual not be a human person?'⁶⁰ he is not denying the mysteriousness of

⁵⁵ Cf. Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologiae* IIIa Q.6 art 4.

⁵⁶ Sermon IX on the Nativity in J. Saward, p. 100.

⁵⁷ Psalm 51.5.

⁵⁸ Romans 5.12-21.

⁵⁹ For example, 'The human being is to be respected and *treated as* a person from the moment of conception' Pope John Paul II *Evangelium Vitae* 60, emphasis added.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

the implied answer. Christians recognize the embryo to be sacred precisely because it is inseparable from the mystery of the creation of the human person by God.⁶¹ What is clear, at the very least, is that the embryo is 'a living thing - under the care of God'.⁶²

30. The following, then, are five principal considerations which should inform any Christian evaluation of the moral status of the human embryo:

I. Though penalties have varied, the Christian tradition has always extended the principle of the sacredness of human life to the very beginning of each human being, and never allowed the deliberate destruction of the fruit of conception.

II. The origin of each human being is not only a work of nature but is a special work of God in which God is involved from the very beginning.

III. The Christian doctrine of the soul is not dualistic but requires one to believe that, where there is a living human individual, there is a spiritual soul.

IV. Each human being is called and consecrated by God in the womb from the first moment of his or her existence, before he or she becomes aware of it. Traditionally, Christians have expressed the human need for redemption as extending from the moment of conception.

V. Jesus, who reveals to Christians what it is to be human, was a human individual from the moment of his conception, celebrated on the feast of the Annunciation, nine months before the feast of Christmas.

⁶¹ Cf. O. O'Donovan *Begotten or made?* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984, ch. 4.

⁶² Athenagoras *Legatio* 35.

31. Jesus reveals the humanity especially of the needy and those who have been overlooked. Concern over the fate of embryos destined for research is inspired, not only by the narratives of the Annunciation, the Visitation and the Nativity, but also by the parable of the good Samaritan and the parable of the sheep and the goats: 'Just as you did it to one of the least of these little ones you did it to me.'⁶³ The aim of an ethically serious amendment to the 1990 Act should be to regulate the procedures in fertility treatment and non-destructive medical research on human embryos such that these human individuals are adequately protected.

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⁶³ Matthew 25.40.

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