



The Salvation Army re-affirms its belief that the grace of God is at work in his creative purposes and that through Christ and the Holy Spirit we understand and encounter the world. We believe all human beings have unique and intrinsic value, being made in the image of God, our creator,^[1] and therefore they should be treated with compassion and justice.^[2]

The genes inherited from our parents influence our physical features and personality traits. Genetic engineering is concerned with altering the characteristics of cells or individuals by artificially modifying or manipulating their genes. Human genetic control might also be exercised by means of cloning, artificial selection of types or selective breeding. These measures have been advocated for a variety of reasons, ranging from the eugenic to the prevention or treatment of hereditary disease.

Clearly some new technological projects offer the prospect of exciting benefits. Accordingly The Salvation Army supports research carried out on adult, or umbilical cord, stem cells. With these principles in mind, we welcome gene therapy for individuals but advise caution regarding the reprogramming of germ-line cells – a process that would affect succeeding generations.

However, many proposals and procedures using genetic engineering present a number of ethical concerns. All human life, including that of the embryo, should be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of sex, economic status, racial origin, or physical or mental ability.^[3] The Salvation Army rejects, therefore, any goal or procedure that undermines its beliefs concerning the worth of humankind and the nature of God,^[4] whose loving, relational character provides the pattern for human relationships and family life.

In particular, we do not support the production or use of embryos as a commodity, as spares, for gifting, exchange, commercial profit or for research. Likewise it is morally unacceptable to carry out procedures on embryos to determine preferred physical characteristics, skills, mental ability and personality traits or for eugenic or any other non-therapeutic purposes. We consider the pursuit of these objectives would adversely affect attitudes towards people with disability, as well as having implications regarding healthcare for those who do not conform to certain norms.

The Salvation Army does not condone practices that threaten the integration of social relationships reflected in marriage and family life. Therefore it does not support human reproductive cloning which, in biblical terms, is a form of idolatry by means of which human beings attempt to usurp the rightful place of the Creator-God.^[5] Cloning encourages the trend towards treating children as commodities. It is replication rather than procreation and therefore threatens personal uniqueness and family relationships.

Similarly, in wanting to uphold the intimate, exclusive bond of marriage, The Salvation Army counsels against the use of donated sperm or ova. However, it understands the distress often caused by childlessness and will readily offer pastoral support in such circumstances.

Scientific developments that are not strictly monitored and regulated can be dangerous, and although some procedures are technically possible there are spiritual, moral and ethical reasons why they ought not to be undertaken. Therefore we urge the appropriate authorities to control research and the use of genetic engineering in a way that takes full account of the true nature of human 'being' and family life.

We also recommend that anyone involved in genetic research should have the right, without fear of discrimination, to withdraw from research programmes on moral, ethical or religious grounds.

Procedures such as the eugenic use of embryos treat human life as imperfect material that we might legitimately mould and upon which we may impose our will. This approach is unacceptable, for we reject the attitude of disrespect for humankind that is sometimes implied. We do not despair of the future of humanity, but instead live in a hope that is grounded in Christ Jesus.

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Footnotes

1. 'So God created human beings in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them' (Genesis 1:27).
2. 'Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy' (Proverbs 31:9). 'Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations' (Matthew 12:18).
3. 'My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favouritism. Suppose someone comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor person in filthy old clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the one wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the one who is poor, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts' (James 2:1-4).
4. Being created in the image of God endows humankind with worth and value, see 1 above; also 1 John 4:8.
5. 'For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him' (Colossians 1:16).

key words

genetic engineering – scientific alteration of the structure of genetic material in a living organism

re-affirm – state something again

intrinsic – belonging to a thing by its very nature

justice – fair treatment

artificial – made by humans; manufactured rather than natural

modifying – changing the form of something

advocated – argued in favour of something

eugenic – relating to improving a

population by controlled breeding

hereditary disease – a disease that is inherited genetically

stem cell – an unspecialised cell that gives rise to a specific specialised cell, such as a blood cell

gene therapy – the treatment of certain disorders, especially those caused by genetic anomalies or deficiencies, by introducing specific engineered genes into a patient's cells

embryo – human offspring in the early stage, following conception up until the end of the eighth week

economic status – the position someone is in regarding their income and wealth

commodity – something that could be bought or sold

commercial profit – profit made through sale of commodities

non-therapeutic – not relating to the medical treatment of a disease or condition

usurp – to take over

replication – a copy of something

procreation – the act of creating children naturally

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