

Stem Cell Speech

Mr MARTIN (Elwick) - Mr President, obviously from public comments which I have already made on this issue it is quite clear to everyone in the Chamber that I support this bill and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the minister for bringing it forward so promptly.

Ms Ritchie - Don't keep us in suspense.

Mr MARTIN - I could finish now, but I will not.

The first thing I would like to say, as I have said publicly, is that I have absolutely no personal vested interest in this decision despite the fact that, as everyone knows, I do have Parkinson's disease which is one of the diseases that it is hoped this research can help in the decades to come. The reason I consider that I have no personal vested interest is - as the Leader just said in his speech quoting Sir Gustav Nossal - that when you are talking about medical research, it is the 'work of decades rather than years.' Unfortunately, for me that is too late and it is too late for most of the current generation of people who suffer from not only Parkinson's disease but also all the other diseases, illnesses and injuries that were referred to in the second reading speech.

Ms Ritchie - Even if there were cures tomorrow I still don't accept you would have a vested interest.

Mr MARTIN - I think I would have, but it would not stop me from speaking.

Mr Aird - No, that's not right. That's a different way of looking at vested interest.

Mr MARTIN - Well, true. I probably would not take a leading role if I were to be affected. But the reality is, as I said, I have no personal vested interest in the matter. Because of that, I have spoken previously in this Chamber when the honourable member for Rumney put forward a notice of motion and I spoke publicly 12 months ago in the media. I think on those occasions I spoke reasonably dispassionately and therefore I was a little surprised at my reaction while sitting in the briefing that we received a couple of weeks ago from doctors from the Menzies Institute. I do not think I said too much but I can remember commenting to the honourable member for Montgomery as I was walking out that I was surprised at how emotional I felt during the questioning. A lot of questions were asked and I was not quite prepared for that. That night at home I tended to

psychoanalyse myself, as one does, and I concluded that I am, by nature, a compassionate person and I am a person who gets quite passionate and therefore quite emotional about issues.

Mr Parkinson - Do you answer all your own questions?

Mr MARTIN - I do.

As members have seen, I get quite emotional on matters such as the indigenous issues and the Treasurer always sets me off because he gets emotional about those issues as well.

Mr Aird - In more ways than one.

Mr MARTIN - Yes. The reality is, Mr President, that I am a person whose emotion tends to bubble over on issues that I care deeply about and I never feel bad about that.

This one I am sure I am emotional about, despite the fact that I do not have a personal vested interest because since my diagnosis I have come in contact with a lot of sufferers of various neuromuscular diseases and I have done a lot of work with the Neuromuscular Disease Alliance. Just about every person who gets Parkinson's disease in Hobart comes to see me now because somehow I am some sort of expert all of a sudden. So over the last couple of years I have seen a lot of people suffering from severe pain, a lot further advanced in the illness than I am.

I see people who have just been diagnosed who are going through the frustrations that I went through in coming to grips with this illness. I am really not that badly affected at the moment but it is just the little day-to-day things - like taking three or four minutes to put on a tie, or rolling up your sleeves - that take that little bit longer when you are running late for work.

Mr Parkinson - You need a wife.

Mr MARTIN - No, I am not that desperate.

Ms Thorp - Excuse me.

Mr Harriss - A brave man.

Ms Ritchie - I don't know who has insulted us the most.

Mr MARTIN - Yes, that is right.

Mr Aird - I want it recorded that I think that's appalling.

Ms Thorp - I just want to know if the honourable member is supporting the bill.

Mr MARTIN - I said that upfront in my first sentence.

Mr Aird - You could say, 'Get a husband'.

Mr PRESIDENT - Order. The honourable Treasurer cannot be heard from that position.

Ms Thorp - I can hear him.

Mr MARTIN - Mr President, the reality is that I am also well aware of my own future which, hopefully according to my diagnosis, is a very distant future and therefore I feel a greater empathy in relation to the future generations who may be assisted by the results of the embryonic **stem cell** research if we pass this bill tonight.

I first started to study this issue 12 months ago when the Federal Parliament was debating it. I do not think you need to be Einstein to realise that, having admitted to having Parkinson's disease - and

Parkinson's was the illness that everyone was talking about in relation to the bill when it went through the Federal Parliament - I had better come up to speed because sooner or later the media would ask me about it - which they did.

At the start of the process of researching it I really expected to be confronted with a drastic moral dilemma. I have always said the most difficult issue I would ever have to face as a policy maker would be the issue of abortion. That is because I totally believe in the sanctity of life. I believe that life is sacred; nothing is more sacred. That is why, for example, I so vehemently oppose war. Because I believe in the sanctity of life, I despair at the thousands of innocent Iraqi civilians who have been slaughtered and maimed over the last few years. As a Christian, I despair every time I hear President Bush talk about the war. He ends his justification for the war with the words 'God bless America', as if God is on his side and in favour of the war. That is not the God I know.

Because of my belief in the sanctity of life I really did expect to have a moral dilemma. But after my study of the science I concluded that there was no moral dilemma for me. The first fundamental question that we all have to face in this debate is quite simple: is the embryonic stem cell a human life? After researching that question, my answer to that is, quite frankly, no it is not in my opinion. I completely respect the reality that other members of this Chamber will come to the other conclusion on this fundamental question. I think the honourable member for Huon made the point on the radio the other day after Tim Cox played a segment of an interview I did 12 months ago - and I agree totally with him - that we both looked at this issue and we came up with alternative points of view. As the honourable member for Huon said, 'I am entitled to my subjective judgement as he is', and we are in total agreement on that.

That, Mr President, is the beauty of democracy, because each member of this Chamber will make their own subjective judgments in this matter based on our own moral, ethical and, in some cases, religious beliefs and values. Each person's values come from the person you are today. I say 'the person you are today' because at 49 years of age my values are slightly different from what they probably were when I was 20 years of age.

Mrs Rattray-Wagner - You're nearly 50.

Mr MARTIN - A couple of days away from being 50. Do you have to remind people of that?

Mrs Rattray-Wagner - You told me when it was.

Mr <MARTIN> - The member for Rumney and the member for Rosevears are the same day.

Mr Finch - And the Speaker in the other place.

Ms Thorp - We are not sure who is the youngest though.

Mr <MARTIN> - I am actually.

Mr President, the point I am making is that our values change as we go through life because our values and our ethical and religious beliefs are influenced by our journey through life. This starts with the parents that we are either lucky or unlucky to be born to - in my case I have been blessed - with the family we have, the friends that come in and out of our lives, touch us for a moment and then sometimes disappear from our lives. They all have an impact. Then there are the children we have, and again I have been blessed. Your values are influenced by the work that you do and I have had a varied career, sometimes two or three careers going at the same time. In my work at the Glenorchy Council, I have been privileged to work with fantastic people who live out in the city of Glenorchy. I have seen a side of life that I probably would not have seen. There are people doing it tough out there, but they are wonderful people and they have had an impact on my thinking. I suppose they have led me to a social justice point of view that I probably might not have had when I was 20.

On this matter the first fundamental decision we have to make is reading and understanding the science. I think when that is done we will all arrive technically at an understanding of what scientists maintain embryonic stem cells are. At that point, we each have a subjective judgment to make on whether this thing is a human life. To me, there is no right or wrong answer because it depends on each person's own personal judgment based on each person's own values and beliefs. As I said, my judgment is that the embryonic <stem cell> is never going to be born, it will never be in a woman's womb and therefore it has no capacity to think, it will never breed or feel any emotions.

Later, I will cover my belief as a Christian that it has no soul and that is of fundamental importance to the Christian debate on this. To me, this cell or embryo is far removed from the consideration I would give a foetus and therefore the moral dilemma I would have in relation to the abortion issue. There is a huge difference between an embryonic <stem cell> and a foetus. Based on my moral, ethical, rational and religious beliefs, I formed a subjective judgment that the embryonic <stem cell> is not human life and because of that I feel there is no moral issue to consider in this matter. I said on the radio that I had been grossly misquoted in an article written by a Christian that was circulated to members. I was quoted out of context and I am disappointed with that. I have no

moral issue to consider as I would have if this issue related to abortion or euthanasia. Other members will come to a different conclusion, that it is human life. As I said, I do not believe that there is any right or wrong answer because it is a subjective judgment. For those members clearly the sanctity of life issue comes into play.

Because I was in the Parliament House last week for three or four days on the affordable housing select committee, I spent a lot of spare time when it was not sitting watching the House of Assembly debate. In addition, I read the remainder of the contributions from the members of the other House. In the last day of discussion on that matter I was in the gallery listening to the final stage of the debate. It occurred to me that every reference that a member of the House of Assembly made to the words 'sanctity of life' were in relation to the 'life' of the embryo. Ironically this is a thing that is never going to be born. I then started to think about all representations that I had received which refer to the sanctity of life and they all refer to the life of an embryo that is never going to be born.

While sitting in the public gallery I began to wonder why people did not use the words 'sanctity of life' when thinking about the multitudes of people in the future who are destined to suffer from shocking degenerative and debilitating diseases. Surely these people deserve a sanctity of life consideration too. During the luncheon adjournment I was standing in the foyer and one of the members of the House of Assembly started a private conversation so I will not say who it was. I did not seek to engage him but he commenced a conversation in which I raised the issue of the sanctity of life from the other perspective.

I think he misunderstood me. I clearly said I was talking about future generations but he probably thought that I was talking about myself. His response quite frankly shocked me because he asked me my age. The implication was that my life, at 49 years of age, is not worth as much as the embryonic **stem cell** which is never going to be born. That really did get me thinking. I am sure the same member, given the beliefs I know he has, would oppose euthanasia supposedly because the life of a person, no matter how old they are, is valued. I do not quite get that.

It was this that decided me to speak to the media about the sanctity of life of the victims and sufferers of illnesses. I thought someone needed to raise the issue because no-one else had. These victims will suffer from the effects of the illnesses, their life spans will be shortened but no-one was talking about their sanctity of life considerations.

Mr President, one of the more common arguments that I have heard in this debate centres on the use of adult stem cells compared to embryonic ones. I do not intend to spend much time on this argument because I think, in the scheme of things, it is a relatively minor point. It is one that should be made but one that will have - and should have, in my belief - a very small bearing on the decision we eventually make in this place. As members know, adult stem cells have been used for

research and clinical purposes now for a couple of decades. I think Professor Schofield said this had been the case for 40 or 50 years. To me it is, quite frankly, silly to compare the results of more than 40 years of extensive work with the emerging embryonic stem cell research of just the last few years.

Ms Ritchie - Eight or nine years.

Mr MARTIN - Yes. To me the science is crystal clear that there are benefits and negatives for both. That is to say that both need to be progressed and understood. To keep one and to throw out the other would be much like saying that we should focus all of society's brain power and financial resources on just having better solar energy and totally ignore or reject hydrothermal or other renewable opportunities for generating power. Of course we would not do that. Why do we need to just choose one and not the other? On the contrary, it is also well understood that a better understanding of embryonic stem cell research will help with additional adult stem cell research breakthroughs as Professor Schofield highlighted in his briefing. The two are complementary and both have benefits over the other.

Mr President, to me there are many distinct benefits to using embryonic stem cells compared to adult stem cells. Foremost is the unique quality to become any cell or tissue in the body and this is a unique potential which scientists are so excited about. Also, embryonic stem cells provide the only window to the earlier stages of human development and the first 14 days of duplication are often where the stage is set for chronic disease. From such research, we can see how this happens and we can learn how to prevent it. That is the potential possibility of this research.

One research document I read shows that basic studies of human embryonic stem cells promise an understanding of the human body that may surpass any contribution to the cells to transplant medicine. This really provides an exciting opportunity that instead of treating people with a chronic disease later in life, these diseases could be understood and then neutralised at an early age or even before conception. To me science is an exploration into the unknown and scientists cannot predict when the next breakthrough will occur. I would like to quote the honourable member for Nelson who said in the briefing - and I liked the description he gave - 'If you don't search you don't discover.' This is a very true statement.

Therefore, Mr President, I understand that it is good to focus on the positive stories of the many breakthroughs achieved through adult stem cells. To me it is a limited argument to suggest that all other research should therefore cease. I personally do not give much weight to this argument.

What I would like to look at now is what we would be giving up if we do not move forward with this legislation and just for a moment consider whose lives we would be impacting. Here are some numbers. Dementia, for example, was made a national health priority for 2005-09 because, first of all, it is a devastating condition. However, there will be more than 240 000 people with dementia by 2010 and an estimated 730 000 suffering from the disease by 2050. There are currently more than 1 000 new cases of dementia each week in Australia and the reality is that dementia directly or indirectly affects one million Australians - one million Australians who are bearing the effects of this disease.

Diabetes Australia says that about 1.5 million Australians suffer from diabetes and the number is expected to reach four million by 2012. That is one fifth of the Australian population. In 2005 it was estimated that between 54 000 and 73 000 people suffered from Parkinson's disease in this country. There were 8 900 new cases reported in 2005 and I was lucky enough to be one of them. By 2025 it is expected that more than 200 000 people will be suffering from Parkinson's disease.

An Access Economic report on multiple sclerosis in Australia states that there are 16 000 Australians who have MS, which is likely to increase by 7 per cent in the next five years. Of those diagnosed, 3 200 people will not be able to work and the estimated cost to the community for these 16 000 people is \$600 million.

Mr President, if we add up these numbers we get close to two million current sufferers increasing to nearly five million by the year 2025. But the numbers do not tell the entire story. Numbers are just numbers. Massive numbers like this just do not give you an idea of the personal suffering, the personal hardship faced by these people and their families and their friends. Let me describe what some of the people will be going through.

In diabetes the following symptoms are common. They suffer from blurred vision and macular degeneration and occasionally blindness. They suffer from numbness and tingling in the hands and feet. They have slow healing of minor scratches and bruises. They suffer from dry or itchy skin and of course there are the ongoing issues involved in constant blood tests, needles and injections.

In the advanced stage of Parkinson's the following symptoms are common: cognitive decline and behavioural problems. The one that scares me the most is that communication becomes almost impossible. There is a difficulty with urination; you fall over a lot. There is an impaired performance of daily living activities.

Mr Aird - You used to do that when you came out drinking with me.

Members laughing.

Mr MARTIN - I suppose since I was diagnosed with the disease the most confronting kind of five minutes I have had was watching an SBS special one night about the actor, Richard Moir; it was a program about how he was going through the brain stimulation operation which was really brought home to me because it was my specialist who was doing the operation and it was just as if I were sitting in the waiting room.

The confronting moment was when they had the camera set up in his bedroom - he lived alone. From the moment he woke up you saw that it took him four hours to build up enough muscle and energy to actually get himself out of bed. Then once he was out of bed he could not swallow because his mouth was locked up and to watch him try to squeeze enough juice out of an orange and to get his mouth just to move was very confronting.

In addition to that you have your walking and balance problems; you have weight loss - so there are some benefits - and, of course, there are always the ongoing worsening tremors and facial movements, the inability to blink and the speech impediments.

For multiple sclerosis the following symptoms are common. Muscle problems such as weakness, leg dragging, clumsiness or lack of coordination, spasticity or uncontrollable tremors, pain and other sensory symptoms, incontinence or inability to urinate, constipation and other bowel disorders, cognitive and emotional problems, emotional symptoms such as depression, anxiety and anger.

Then there is dementia, which is another disease I have seen at first hand because my dad suffered from it - and I mean suffered - for the last two years of his life. To a large extent that changed my values in relation to euthanasia because no-one should suffer like I watched my dad suffer for the last two years of his life. For advanced Alzheimer's what you see is groaning, screaming, mumbling and speaking gibberish. The moment that was burnt in my memory so that I will never forget was one night when as Mayor I was at a black tie dinner at Sandy Bay. I got a phone call from the nursing home. My dad was out of control and, as I was the only person he seemed to have any memory of, they asked me to come in immediately. From the minute I walked through the door there was my dad, a man who has been a member of parliament, mayor of Glenorchy and a successful businessman, curled up on his bed in a foetal position, screaming at me to look out for whatever he could see on the floor that I could not see - I think he was seeing snakes. To see a person you love and respect in that condition is nothing that anyone should have to go through, but people go through it day after day after day. The behavioural symptoms such as refusing to eat, the failure to recognise familiar faces, which is most difficult for the family and friends, and the

pressure all impact on the family. My dad's wife visited him for two years in the nursing home, despite the fact that he did not know who she was, but she never stopped going. Again, there are families like that all over Australia, all over the world, day after day. These are the people that we are talking about, and I believe they have a sanctity of life consideration as well.

These conditions describe the everyday life of thousands of ordinary people, people who are living, breathing, interacting human beings. In the future it is people like these who will most likely benefit or, alternatively, continue to suffer, depending on the outcome of the decision we make tonight. Every person in this Chamber knows one or more of these sufferers. I am sure the honourable member for Mersey would know a lot of them. Those amongst us who have made the judgment that an embryonic **stem cell** is a sacred human life then have to ask whether the sacredness of an embryo is of more importance than the potential to relieve the suffering of millions of Australia or tens of thousands of Tasmanians. I think that is the secondary question. Furthermore, the question is whether people's ideology, theology or logic stops them from approving this bill.

That brings me to my next and final area of discussion, and it is one I thought I would never get into in this Chamber. I am doing this because all of the lobbying I have received in relation to this issue through personal meetings, e-mails and letters that have come to me supporting the argument against this bill have been from Christian organisations and from a Christian perspective. Due to this and due to my own personal Christian beliefs, I feel it is important for me to explain my view in relation to the Christian perspective. The opinion that has been put to me by many in the Christian community is that if you are believer in God then you are or should be against embryonic **stem cell** research. Accordingly, because of the public decision I have taken, I have had people ring me up calling me an atheist. If I were an atheist I would be proud to admit it, but I am not. I happen to be a Christian and I believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ. I would like to challenge this notion that Christians should oppose this legislation. Where does this idea come from? Was it the theology of one priest who told another priest who told another priest and sooner or later everyone simply believed it as fact? Is it actually biblical? Is it in the Bible? What does Jesus say about this issue? Well before I was diagnosed with Parkinson's, I always wondered about and tried to understand the logic used by most Christians as to why an embryo should automatically be considered a human life and, more than that, a sacred human life. In my research on this issue I quickly discovered that I am not the only person with Christian beliefs who doubts and has found what we believe to be gaping holds in the theology and the logic of the standard Christian argument.

What I intend to talk about next are not my thoughts exclusively, but are a mixture of ideas and concepts from discussions with many Christians over the last few weeks in particular, plus information that I have found through research. What I intend to do is in a way challenge the common Christian logic and suggest that maybe the beliefs are problematic and from my perspective, a little bit questionable.

But, as I said, this debate is objective by nature. I must admit that some people have warned me about challenging Christian theology and morality in this debate and I have to say my personal political gut instinct tells me I probably should not do it. But in some ways I do not know how you can actually debate the subject without discussing Christian belief and logic.

So I am reminded when I am reading the New Testament that Jesus spent a third of his time healing the sick, a third of his time preaching the good news and the other third of his time telling the spiritual leaders of the day that the theology was a little bit mixed up. Often they had the right heart or motivations but not the truth.

There are three broad questions that I would like to address. They are, first of all, when is the soul or the spirit created in a person and why is this of critical importance to Christians. Secondly, how important is the sperm, the egg or the embryo to God and, most importantly, what does the biblical evidence suggest and therefore what would Jesus do if he was in this Chamber tonight, as I believe he is.

The first question that I would like to address relates to the common Christian viewpoint of the soul and how this relates to this debate. The soul is commonly defined as, and I quote:

'The principle of life, feeling, thought and action in humans, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body' -

Separate from the body -

'and commonly held to be a separable in existence from the body. The spiritual part of humans as distinct from the physical part.'

Clearly from this definition, the soul is not attached to the body, as such, and it is distinct from the physical part.

Also it is the existence of the soul that necessitates the sanctity of life argument and that an embryo is sacred and must be preserved and protected because it is considered by some Christians to have a soul. So the question is: when is the soul added to the shell of a person and the body by God?

According to the Bible, a person does not exist unless or until they have a soul and also put another way, a person is dead when the soul leaves them. To non-Christians this may seem totally irrelevant but to a professing Christian, without the soul all that exists is dust or bits and pieces of stuff. Eternity is only possible due to the soul. It is the soul that lives on forever, the body dies but the soul goes back to Heaven.

Ecclesiastes 6:7 from *The Message Bible* says, and I quote:

'Life, lovely while it lasts, is soon over. Life, as we know it, precious and beautiful, ends. The body is put back in the same ground it came from. The spirit returns to God who first breathed it.'

So, Mr President, why is this important? If you believe that the moment an egg and sperm meet a soul is created and therefore a life, which must be what Christians believe to sustain the argument, then you must also believe that through the centuries and worldwide there are billions - absolute billions - of naturally aborted embryos in a woman's uterus who may have joined for only one day, one hour, one minute or one second who will actually turn up in heaven - that would be the Christian belief.

Specialist reproductive doctors will tell you that statistically over a period of time embryos that form naturally in a woman actually fail at least as often as those that would be born. There are many reasons for this. Sometimes the embryo does not make it to the uterus and gets stuck in the fallopian tube, sometimes it makes it to the uterus and stops dividing, sometimes the cell wall of the uterus rejects the embryo and many times the embryo attaches to the cell wall and then dies within minutes. So the reality is that in fact God has created woman in such a way that the majority of embryos die - that is God's creation.

The problem, when understood, that this creates with the standard Christian argument in this debate is that this would mean that every one of these naturally destroyed embryos would then end up in heaven. So heaven would be quite full of so-called people who never made it past the point of the union of the egg and the sperm. So you can imagine a possible scene in heaven. 'Hi Mum, I'm your embryo that died before even splitting once, it's great to see you'. In fact, there would be literally hundreds of these so-called people in heaven compared to every one actual believer who made the conscious decision to follow Christ, and this flies in the face of most biblical teaching on rationale for the creation of human kind and the reasons why God gave us the choice, to follow him or reject him.

If you walked up to most Christians in the street and asked them if they thought that there would be hundreds of people in heaven compared to every one believer, that there would be these millions that had never lived more than 10 days in the womb, then they simply would not believe you. No Christian would believe that. Contrary to this, I found many Christians who do not accept the common belief at face value, they in turn believe that the breath of God has not entered into the cells until he, being God, decides to do so and they can back this up biblically. It is God who brings life, not man, and it seems ridiculous to them that a Christian would believe that a cell that had lived for one duplication would end up in heaven as a child of God. But this is what you must believe in if you say an embryo has a soul. So when does God create a soul? It is simple though extremely problematic for Christians to say that a soul is created when the sperm reaches the egg. But as only God knows when a life is created, only God knows when he will take it away.

The reality is that the Bible is silent on this matter. It clearly and unambiguously does not say that an embryo is a soul. You will not find that in the Bible. But worst of all, what does the typical Christian belief say about our own God, my God? If a researcher, as has been suggested, is the killer of human beings for using an embryo for research that may lead to a cure, then God, who created a woman's body in such a way as to kill more embryos than those who live, is actually killing people at a greater rate than cancer, car accidents, suicide and old age combined. Obviously this would seem ridiculous, so how can it be true that this is the typical Christian argument. I have heard the argument that it is intent that matters. For example, a standard couple are not considered baby killers for trying to have a baby even though they know that a high percentage of the soul-filled embryos produced will die within days of fertilisation. Some so-called ethical scientists say that it is the intent that is important, not the actual death of the living being. Well that really is a slippery slope argument indeed, but I do agree in some ways.

So what is the intent of embryonic **stem cell** research? I would suggest that the intent of this research is to find cures and help people live without chronic disease and discomfort, and surely that is an honourable intent. Surely that is similar to the honourable intent to have your own baby, regardless of the consequential destruction of most of the embryos in the process.

My second question is: how important is the human body to God and therefore how important are the sperm and egg or the embryo? In the Bible God says that a body is simply a home for the soul. Bodies are not special in themselves but they are needed as a house. When God said, 'Before you were born I knew you', he was talking to the soul. He was not talking to the shell. In my view an egg that has been joined with sperm is no more or less to God than the potential of a human being, but in itself it is not a human being. There are stories in the Bible where God instantly created and spoke of creating human bodies out of the ground, the dust, the soil or out of dry bones. To illustrate my point to those Christians who have contacted me, there is a great passage from the book of Ezekiel in chapter 37, entitled the Valley of Dry Bones. This shows biblically that it is not the bones, it is not the flesh or the tendons, it is clearly and unambiguously the breath of God that makes the body a human being with a soul, not the coming together of an egg and the sperm. But does this mean the bones are sacred and that legislation should be introduced to allow for them to turn into a human, just in case? This is of course ridiculous.

I think you also would have heard of Jesus and some other disciples bringing someone who was dead back to life. In other words, the body was there and the life was not. Clearly this shows that you have a body without a soul and it is clear that Jesus was interested in healing the sick. A sperm and an egg is simply the means in my opinion which God uses to build the body or the home of a human being. In creating a tree he uses a seed. The potential of the embryo only becomes sacred when God places a soul into it and then we have the sacred life that must be preserved. If sperm and egg were sacred to God then I ask the question, why would he create so many sperm that will die, and so many eggs that will never meet with the sperm? If joining the two together does not automatically create a soul then why would God be against using them to potentially heal people? Where is the logic in the argument given by so many Christians - and I count myself as a believer. As an example, a seed from a tree has the potential to become a dining room table and it also has the potential to be a carved elephant. Some would say in Tasmania that it has the potential to be a piece of paper. Or it has the potential to remain as a tree.

An embryo likewise has the potential to turn into a human being if certain things happen. It also has the potential to create cells to heal a human being or the potential to turn back into dust. Under this legislation we know that the embryo will never become a foetus. It will never be in a woman's womb and be born. It will never be a baby and in the eloquent words of a member in another place, 'It is never going to be a beautiful little girl'. We know that is never going to happen therefore it will never have a soul and, in my opinion, we are not destroying a potential human as far as God is concerned.

Even if we were, which I do not believe, the fact remains that God himself created humankind in a way that allows the destruction of embryos to happen naturally and on a scale that makes the embryos used for research look like chickenfeed. Let us think of an alternative idea that God had and imagine for a moment that he created excess sperm and egg because he knew that at a certain time in history mankind would have the technological expertise to use these building blocks to help heal people. God might have thought that these people would wonder at the creative genius of the creator to be able to come up with this way of helping people in the greatest hour of need. Mr President, this is the type of God that I know and I believe in.

Finally, what does the Bible say about helping people and what do I think Jesus would do if he were in this Chamber tonight? I believe that he actually is. Let me just list a few things Christians do know. There is the story of the good Samaritan where a priest would not offer healing help but a non-believer did. Jesus praised the non-believer and condemned the priest. The Bible tells us that Jesus healed the blind, the lame, the leper, the cripple and the women who bled. Finally the Bible tells us that Jesus healed multitudes.

Christians know all that because it is all in the Bible. What would Jesus have us do? The Bible makes it clear that the human body is only a shell, a home for the soul that is here one day and gone

the next. Jesus asked us to love one another and provide healing for the sick. Bearing this in mind, why would Christians not err towards what they do know; that God gave us an amazing brain and asked us to work out ways to love one another and to heal the sick?