



THE SALVATION ARMY UNITED KINGDOM TERRITORY
WITH THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

POSITIONAL STATEMENT

HUMAN GENETIC ENGINEERING

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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¹ Genesis 1:27

² Proverbs 31:9; Matthew 12:18

³ 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 Colossians 1:16