



Written by [Mary McHugh](#) on April 26, 2010

Vatican Supports Adult Stem-cell Research

The Vatican will help fund a research study into the potential use of adult stem cells to treat intestinal and possibly other diseases, officials announced April 23. The research study, now in a preliminary stage, is being carried out by a group of American and Italian scientists led by the University of Maryland's School of Medicine.



The university said that the Vatican had already agreed to donate 2 million euros (\$2.7 million) for the project. Cardinal Renato Martino said the exact amount would be decided in future meetings.

The Vatican views adult stem-cell research as a viable alternative to embryonic stem-cell research. The Catholic Church is opposed to embryonic stem-cell research because, unlike adult stem-cell research, it involves the destruction of human life (embryos).

Cardinal Martino said the adult stem-cell research project enjoys Vatican support due to its respect for the life of the embryo. "This research protects life," the Cardinal asserted during a meeting with Italian and American scientists and health officials to outline the project. "I want to stress that it doesn't involve embryonic stem cells, where one helps oneself and then throws the embryo away and kills a human life."

The scientist leading the project is Alessio Fasano, who told the Associated Press before the April 23 meeting that his team will be researching the potential therapeutic use of intestinal adult stem cells: "We want to harvest them, we want to isolate them, we want to make them grow outside our body and see if they are pluripotent."

"If we reach that phase, if we are able to achieve that goal, then our next step is to eventually move to clinical application," Fasano added.

He said that intestinal stem cells have certain features that make them appealing for this kind of research. They are very active cells — the intestine replenishes all its cells every few days — and they are intrinsically flexible — already programmed to generate all the various kinds of cells such as mucus cells or epithelial cells present in the highly complex organ. In addition, Fasano noted that harvesting them can be done through a routine procedure like endoscopy and it is hoped that within the next two or three years his team will have a first answer on the feasibility of this project.



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