News from the Field

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Parthenogenesis: Does It Produce an Embryo?

In late October, scientists at a meeting of the American Society for Reproductive Medicine (ASRM) announced that they had successfully created a new method of obtaining human embryonic stem cells which would allegedly avoid the ethical quandaries associated with the use of human embryos. The method, called parthenogenesis, stimulates an egg to duplicate its 23 chromosomes, or retain the original 46 chromosomes it has early in its development, and then begin dividing. Scientists asserted that this method is free of ethical concerns because it does not create an embryo, but rather an entity called a "parthenote." But does it create an embryo? Other proponents of parthenogenesis, such as Michael West of Advanced Cell Technology, have publicly said that the method *does* create human embryos. How should we proceed in the face of such uncertainty? An initial question to pose: If an entity can produce human stem cells, should it be regarded as human? ■

Artificial Heart Offers New Hope

A handful of patients who would otherwise have died from their heart conditions have been offered a new hope – a mechanical heart. The new device, which is self-contained and needs only a battery pack worn around the waist for power, is still in clinical trials. Patients who have received the heart have been recovering as well as, or better than, expected.

The first patient to receive the new device, Robert Tools, died in November from internal bleeding and multiple organ failure. Internal bleeding is one possible side effect from the use of anticoagulants, which must be taken by organ transplant patients. Mr. Tools lived almost six months with the artificial heart – five months longer than he was expected to live with his original heart. ■

A Review of the Book "Faith @ Science: Why Science Needs Faith in the Twenty-First Century"

(by Denyse O'Leary, Winnipeg, Canada: J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing Inc., 2001)

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In *Faith @ Science: Why Science Needs Faith in the Twenty-First Century,* author Denyse O'Leary does an excellent job of covering many important scientific issues that Christians must become informed about and address. This book consists of a compilation of short articles written by O'Leary that cover a wide range of scientific issues from a Christian perspective. In some of these essays, O'Leary actually quotes Scripture, relating it to the issue being discussed. Her articles very clearly explain how Christian faith should affect beliefs about current science and its application to everyday life.

Faith @ Science addresses a broad spectrum of scientific topics. The first section deals with moral dilemmas in our society and the fact that bigger, faster science lacks the power to solve our moral problems. One particularly interesting essay in this section deals with Christian couples who underwent *in vitro* fertilization and who were advised by their doctors to "selectively reduce" (abort) one or more of their multiple babies. O'Leary considers various cases in which Christian couples were counseled to selectively reduce and discusses the biblical responses of those couples and the reactions of their doctors. She then comments upon the issue of *in vitro* fertilization in general and its use by Christians and shares ways in which Christian couples have dealt with either the guilt of having selectively reduced or the dilemma resulting from the storage of "extra" frozen embryos following *in vitro* fertilization.

In the second section of this book, "How Big Are Our Footprints?," O'Leary includes a compilation of essays regarding how Christians should react to and think about environmental issues. Among other topics, she considers the issues raised by genetically engineered food, including its possible effect on our environment and on the economies of less well-off countries.

The third section of *Faith @ Science* deals with the myths of evolutionary theory. O'Leary's essays focus on the "Big Bang" theory, the politics behind the teaching of evolution, and the questionable or inaccurate nature of some of what is being taught as "scientific fact." These essays are eye-opening, revealing much of the motivation behind why there has been a push in recent years to make the teaching of evolution a very high priority in relation to other scientific topics.

In the fourth section of the book, O'Leary discusses what she terms "The Really Difficult Problems in Faith and Science." In this section, she outlines and attempts to answer five questions that she believes are crucial for people of faith to confront. These issues include intelligent design and faith and healing.

The final portion of *Faith @ Science* details the exploitation of human life for scientific purposes as seen, for example, in abortion, the trafficking of fetal tissue and body parts, and, most recently, in embryonic stem cell research. The author does an exceptional job in this section.

Overall, I would highly recommend *Faith @ Science,* especially for the less scientifically-oriented reader. While many books on scientific/bioethical issues delve into the science in too much detail for the average reader, O'Leary has done a wonderful job of presenting her information in a way that makes this book easily readable by anyone. This book is an excellent compilation of essays which cover a widely varied array of topics that must be addressed by Christians as we seek to live godly lives in a post-modern culture. ■