



March 2, 2005 - Massachusetts Bishops' statement on human cloning and research on human embryos

The following statement was released March 2 jointly by the bishops of the four dioceses of Massachusetts: Archbishop Seán P. O'Malley of Boston, Bishop George W. Coleman of Fall River, Bishop Timothy A. McDonnell of Springfield and Bishop Robert J. McManus of Worcester.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is in the midst of a debate about human cloning and embryo research. As the Roman Catholic Bishops of this state we affirm that a deeply rooted respect for human life should always guide our public policy. We should not stray, even for the most noble of reasons, from the commitment to protect every human being. If the means are wrong, then the ends cannot justify them. Human life is sacred; presuming this truth at every level of our society is a basic moral obligation.

We call on our policymakers to affirm the dignity of human life by banning human cloning in all its forms. Cloning involves the laboratory creation of an individual's identical twin at the embryo stage through means other than the natural union of a mother's egg and a father's sperm. Some scientists are working towards the day they can clone to bring new life to full maturity. Others are already cloning new human life only for destruction, harvesting embryonic stem cells through methods that kill the cloned embryo. The cloning process itself denies a cloned child the right to come into existence with and through a mother and a father, and distorts biological and familial relationships. Creating life only to destroy it adds to the offense against human dignity. The Catholic Church opposes human cloning for any purpose.

Some argue that human embryos created by the joining of sperm and egg through in vitro fertilization, and abandoned in frozen storage at IVF clinics, should be donated to science. We disagree. The intrinsic worth of human life is not affected by whether one is wanted or abandoned.

We urge that our laws be strengthened to clearly prohibit the killing for research purposes of any human embryos, however created. We oppose any bill that endorses or funds such unethical experiments on human life.

Our Commonwealth should join the United Nations which gave initial approval this February to a declaration condemning all human cloning and embryonic research as "incompatible with human dignity and the protection of human life". This international move demonstrates that the debate cannot be reduced to a disagreement between religion and science. Rather, as the U.N. declaration states, the core concern is that "scientific and technical progress in life sciences should be sought in a manner that safeguards respect for human rights and the benefit of all".

Ethical research involving adult stem cells has already achieved great success and gives patients real hope for cures. Adult stem cells can be obtained from a person's own bone marrow, blood supply and other organs of the body without harming the donor. Thanks to good science, therefore, society does not need to stray from its commitment to life in order to alleviate human suffering.

Science aids the drive to cure and the need to know, and for that we are grateful. These objectives, however, cannot be pursued at all costs. Scientific research and biomedical technology must, like all human endeavors, fit within a moral and legal framework.

Supporters of legislation in Massachusetts that favors embryonic stem cell research want to downplay any connection between this research and the cloning and destruction of human life. They argue that a process that researchers are using to get embryonic stem cells, called "somatic cell nuclear transfer," does not involve the cloning of human embryos, and they claim that following up this process with the harvesting of embryonic stem cells does not result in the loss of embryonic life.

We hope that the general public and our public officials are not fooled by such false claims. Two different federal bioethics commissions made up of scientists acting under former President Bill Clinton in 1996 and current President George W. Bush in 2004 both concluded that "somatic cell nuclear transfer" involves the laboratory creation of human



embryos, and is a form of cloning. Joining other scientific authorities, the 2004 commission expressly found that embryos formed either naturally or by cloning are living and human, sharing the same biological nature. Cloned human embryos are human beings with a claim on our conscience; they deserve the respect and protection accorded to the human person. Extracting embryonic stem cells from any embryos, whether cloned or otherwise created, will kill the embryos. The lethal connection between cloning for research purposes and harvesting of embryonic stem cells can neither be denied nor wished away.

Legislators have already heard moving testimony from patients with Parkinson's Disease and other disabling conditions who, despite their circumstances and desire for a cure, would refuse any treatment produced at the expense of another's life. These patients are seeking, and finding, effective treatments using adult stem cells and other life-affirming methods.

The world also has been deeply affected by the profound moral witness of Pope John Paul II, who struggles with Parkinson's-like disabilities, and yet continues to plead with scientists to pursue research only through ethical means. Science does not have to kill in order to cure. We join the Holy Father's appeal to members of the biotechnology and scientific communities to turn away from research that is both unethical and unnecessary.

We, the Roman Catholic Bishops in Massachusetts, urge all Catholics and other citizens of good will to register your concerns about destructive research on human embryos by contacting Governor Romney and your state legislators as soon as possible. Call on them to support legislation that bans all forms of human cloning and any research that destroys human life. Ask them to oppose legislation that endorses or funds these unethical acts.

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