

**Lutheran Church of Australia:
Commission on Social and Bioethical Questions**

Human Cloning: Some preliminary considerations

What's the fuss about?

Why does anyone bother speaking against human cloning procedures?

Rather, isn't it exciting and welcome to hear of –

- Drs Hall and Stillman announce how they had 'cloned' embryos (via embryo division and renucleation in 1993);
- the cloned sheep, 'Dolly' (via cell renucleation; announced February 1997);
- American researchers claiming to have cloned the first human embryo (Dolly-fashion; November 2001);
- the Raelian biotechnology company, Clonaid, claiming to have overseen the production and birth of 'Eve', the first cloned child (December 2003); and
- the South Korean announcement of the verified cloning of the first mature human embryos (January 2004)?

Surely all human cloning debates are silenced when the public assurance from the scientific community is so full of compassion – 'Our intention is not to create cloned human beings. Rather, it is to make life-saving therapies for a wide range of human disease conditions'¹ And ostensibly to reassure any uneasy consciences that nothing untoward is happening, a philosophical comment is appended: 'The entities we are creating are not individuals. They're only cellular life; they're not human life.'²

Ours is indeed a time of tremendous medical progress, especially as regards genetic medicine. It is a time in which much is being glimpsed and promised by researchers, and a time society looks eagerly to the ongoing development of diagnostic tools and genetic therapies for overcoming the most feared illnesses. It seems only right to bring hope and healing to countless lives through taking up the new scientific powers with a passion. Is not this too what is to be understood by Christians in hearing that God commands, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over [creation]'³?

For all the good that is aimed at and is gradually being achieved, yet the debate on human cloning goes on. Most notably, the debate is part of the deliberations of the United Nations, where in late 2003 approximately 60 nations backed a Costa Rican resolution to ban all human cloning. Opposing nations, generally, were backing a ban on cloning human beings (so-called 'reproductive cloning') but seeking to sanction research cloning (so-called 'therapeutic cloning'). Since that initial debate, the legal committee of the UN's General Assembly voted (18 February 2005) by a slim majority in favour of a non-legally binding agreement that asks member states to prohibit reproductive cloning and adopt legislation to respect "human dignity" and "human life." It would appear, in what seems to be a compromise-proposal by avoiding any definition of when human life begins, that philosophy and economy remain squared off against each other.

Even the passionate summary-comments cited above give the impression that the mind of society is yet to be won over, that the full conversation on human cloning has not been had. There are those who hear such comments and feel that perhaps society is being 'had'.

For them, there are a number of significant questions that are worthy of consideration, if genuine goodness for people is to be fulfilled – questions such as:

- Is Compassion really the god among human motivations, such that noble goals justify any means of achievement of them? If there is no forethought about and consideration of right and truth along with compassion, is not society unprotected from loveless actions, and left with a mess, and regrets? When people suffer, compassion remains a determination to oppose suffering – what of the place of sympathy, the readiness to enter into the dark world of people’s sufferings and griefs? Perhaps there is power in this apparent powerlessness. Is not sympathy, too, of the essence of being truly human? Is talk of compassion a mask covering other less noble motivations?
- Will research cloning, with its demand for human eggs, simply end in the exploitation of women?
- Is there any real distinction between Reproductive Cloning and Therapeutic Cloning, considering what the biology textbooks stipulate, that all human life begins with and is cellular life too?
- If the accepted philosophical approach concerning embryos is that they are nothing other than ‘cellular entities’, then, following the logic to its end, why should there be any practical concern about ethics or concern over social and/or genetic engineering and management and manipulation of people? Even, why not leap ahead into genetically crossing the species barriers? After all, in time society’s ‘Yuk Factor’ to such options would diminish. Additionally, no one could definitely state that the new creatures would only mean harm to society. Or ... is there indeed something deep and true sensed so that people confess, “Human life matters!”
- How are children, from conception on, to be understood – as a commodity to be manufactured and managed (‘customized’?), or as a gift received through parental self-giving and welcomed as an equal? Would the anti-discrimination laws play a role here? What are the likely physical and psychological harms to children who understand themselves to be someone’s ‘project’ / ‘product’? Could it be that lawsuits will follow failed expectations of child produced? And, is human life about achieving a heaven on earth, or about living the heavenly way come what may?
- Has (tax-paying) society been given due encouragement to consider supporting the development of genetic therapies from adult stem cell research, which is proving to be already effective and avoids the usual ethical problems?

In the pursuit of truly good medicine, it would seem there is reason for further private, public and international conversation on the human cloning issues.

For people of good will, the above are some of the chief concerns about human cloning, just as they are for those who confess God as the creating, saving and sanctifying Lord of all us limited human creations. In Jesus Christ, crucified and risen from the dead for all, comes the divine revelation that we are not managed but loved by God, not buffed like a trophy but re-made in His image, no longer caught in the counterfeit pursuit of self but free to forget ourselves to live and love as He intended from the beginning.

– Pastor Tim Kowald
February 2005

¹ Dr Robert Lanza, vice-president of medical and scientific development at Advanced Cell Technology biotechnology company, USA, in an interview with David Derbyshire, Science Correspondent, *News Telegraph*, filed 26 November 2001.

² Michael West, chief executive officer of Advanced Cell Technology, in an interview with David Derbyshire, Science Correspondent, *News Telegraph*, filed 26 November 2001.

³ Genesis 1:28 RSV