

\* These letters are in response to a published review article that appeared in the July 2002 issue of the SMJ and the authors of the review have been provided with a right of reply. No further correspondence on this issue will be published in the journal. The views reflect those of the authors and do not represent the views of the editorial board.

**Article: Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (Cloning): Implications for the Medical Practitioner**  
(SMJ Vol 43 Issue 7 July 2002)

Dear Sir,

Tong, Ng and Ng's inaccurate representation of Catholic belief "*the Roman Catholic Church ... condemns the cloning of all life<sup>(1)</sup>*" does little to contribute to useful scientific progress or to understanding and inter-religious harmony. But as a Catholic myself, I would like to thank them for giving me this opportunity to re-state what Catholics believe and why they do so.

Catholics do not condemn the "*cloning of all life*" nor do they condemn all cloning of plant or animal life for agricultural, scientific or medical purposes.

Instead, Catholics believe that manipulation and killing of embryonic **human beings** by embryonic stem cell research (ESCR) and somatic cell nuclear transfer (SCNT or cloning) is wrong and must not be done for any reason. Use of adult stem cells, a promising alternative, does not attract this absolute condemnation as this does not kill human beings.

Roman Catholic Church teaching on this is very clear – "*No objective, even though noble in itself, such as a foreseeable advantage to science, to other human beings or to society, can in any way justify experimentation on living human embryos or fetuses, whether viable or not, either inside or outside the mother's womb. The informed consent ordinarily required for clinical experimentation on adults cannot be granted by the parents, who may not freely dispose of the physical integrity or life of the unborn child<sup>(2)</sup>*".

Good intentions such as valid scientific and medical purposes do not justify unjust acts. If they did, what would we call these unjust acts - good things to do? To thus misrepresent evil as good opens the door to every unjust action, since no one does anything without a good reason.

Despite this and despite the killing of the embryo, the possible benefits of ESCR and SCNT are the main reasons put forward by those who support them. Clearly not everyone holds the view that every human being has intrinsic value.

It should be realised that the view of the UK committee in 1982-4 led by the philosopher *Dame Mary Warnock* that a human person begins when the primitive streak appears on the 14<sup>th</sup> day after fertilisation runs counter to current scientific knowledge that right from day 1 a human is a totipotent being systematically and seamlessly executing the instructions of his human genome into adulthood.

Indeed, no self-fulfilling declaration that any human tissue or organ is "not yet developed" can negate or excuse the destruction of the early human's ongoing genetic program that is destined to develop it.

To surmount the irrationality of the Warnock stand, the term pre-embryo was coined as a surrogate for pre-human, a fiction questioned by Jerome Lejeune in 1989, "*..there is no such word. There is no need for a subclass of the embryo to be called a preembryo, because there is nothing before the embryo<sup>(3)</sup>*". Common sense and science however lost to the law.

Today's values, culture and law remain at odds. Despite decades of improvement and much talk about human rights since the Nazi holocaust, the prevailing view remains that only utilitarian status should be granted to some human beings. Whether by abortion up to 24 weeks for social reasons or by ESCR or SCNT up to 14 days for human experimentation, a human being is manipulated or killed for others. World class excellence should not be pursued through such baseness. This is wrong.

Yours sincerely,

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**REFERENCES**

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2. The Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith; Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation: I.4, February 22, 1987
3. Case No E-14496, Davis v Davis, County Court for Blount County, Tennessee, USA: August 7,8 & 10, 1989.

**Article: Somatic Cell Nuclear Transfer (Cloning): Implications for the Medical Practitioner**  
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Dear Sir,

We wish to thank Dr Snodgrass for his letter, which refers to the stand of the Roman Catholic faith. It rightly points out to the Church's opinion on cloning of humans, and not of other life forms. The doctrine of most faiths refer to human beings and their relationship amongst their kind and God, though some faiths define this with the others that share this Earth.

As to the rest of the letter which refers to life, embryos and pre-embryos, we have stated in the article that "widespread and continuing education, discussion and deliberation to understand the ethical and social implications of all cloning technology" is necessary. We believe that the above discussion is useful, and we thank Dr Snodgrass for his views.

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