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Testimony in Support of House Bill 138 (Ban on Human Cloning)

Testimony of Rev. Thomas A. Smith
 Catholic Conference of Kentucky Bishops Pro-Life Committee
 Before the Senate Judiciary Committee
 Hearing on House Bill 138 (Human Cloning)
March 20, 2002

I am Rev. Thomas A. Smith, a member of the Pro-Life Committee of the Catholic Conference of Kentucky. As a representative of that body, I am grateful for the opportunity to be present today to argue in support of House Bill 138 which addresses an issue that goes to the very heart of what it means to be human..

For the sake of brevity I offer for consideration the following four (4) points in support of House Bill 138.

1. "All Cloning is Reproductive"

There is general agreement that human cloning to produce another human being is wrong because it is an affront to the human dignity of the one cloned, who deserve to come into the world in ways that respect this dignity; and, it is an affront to the human dignity shared by all the citizens of this state.

There is no valid ethical, scientific, or medical grounds to endorse human cloning, which devalues and commercializes human life in general. Such is a compelling reason in itself to ban human cloning. And we applaud the House of Representatives for passing HB 138 and thank the Senate Judiciary for giving this issue the attention it demands.

But while opposing "*reproductive cloning*", some in this body would give allowance to a so-called "*therapeutic cloning*" for research. I state for the record that "*therapeutic cloning*," medical or otherwise, is mere illusion. Legislation that purports to condemn "*reproductive cloning*" while at the same time allowing, even supporting "*therapeutic cloning*", in reality, does not ban cloning. Rather, such legislation only prevents the further development, i.e., implantation, of an already cloned human being.

All cloning, in truth and in fact, is reproductive by definition, i.e., creates/reproduces a new developing human genetically identical to the cloned subject. The attempted distinction exists only in the mind of those who seek to utilize such clones for other purposes, e.g., research projects.

"*Therapeutic cloning*" is an invalid construct, political or scientific; an immoral means to a grave end; an invention to ease the conscience of the public in order to harvest stem cells for research; in order to assure research benefit; in order to procure and acquire research monies. It is, in finality, a play upon public sympathies that threatens potential loss of research monies; that dangles before the naive public the fear of restricting needed "*cures*" of modern ailments and disabilities.

2. "*Therapeutic Cloning Destroys Embryonic Human Life*"

While some may wish to debate the moral status of this new human organism, no one can question its membership in the human species, or deny that true reproductive cloning (the production of a genetically identical organism) has taken place.

Because cloned embryos are seen as useful research material for destructive experiments, there are current attempts to avoid restrictions on embryo research by denying to the cloned "*entity*" the name embryo.

Misleading and inaccurate terms are employed ("totipotent/pluripotent cells," "clump of embryonic cells," "unfertilized cells," "pre-embryo" etc.). Utilization of these terms betrays the effort to conceal the fact that researchers want to be allowed to clone and to destroy living human embryos.

3. "*Embryonic Therapeutic Cloning is a Broken Promise*"

In the very recent years, the initial enthusiasm over embryonic stem cells research has been dampened in the scientific community by some rather sober realizations.

It needs to be stated that "*embryonic therapeutic stem cell research*" has yet to produce a single human benefit. While "*adult stem cell research*", (pluripotent but not embryonic), which is truly therapeutic, is already being applied with successful results. Adult stem cell research has successfully treated hundreds of thousands of patients. In short, the claim that human embryo cloning is needed to advance promising medical research is simply false. See www.stemcellresearch.org.

4. "Public Support of Embryonic Stem Cell Research is an Untruth"

When truly objective surveys are attempted, 70% of the American populace responded with a resounding "NO" when asked if the federal government should fund stem cell research which requires destroying human embryos. In a choice between funding embryonic stem cell research or stem cell research *without* embryonic stem cells, the clear majority of Americans asked supported the "adult" stem cell approach to research (67% to 18%). (International Communications Research, June 8, 2001. See <http://www.usccb.org/comm/archives/2001/01-101.htm>).

The tone of the American populace in this regard is quite clear regardless of the source of research funding.

Conclusion

Catholic tradition honors scientific achievement when it upholds human dignity and the common good. This is not the case with embryonic stem cell research. Progress in stem cell research and other medical advances has never really depended upon human cloning, "*reproductive*" or "*therapeutic*". Such research, if allowed, perpetuates a regression in society's respect for all human life and is seen as an attack upon our basic human dignity.

The question before this legislative body is whether or not to sanction the direct destruction of innocent human life. In a State that prides itself on its "Christian" heritage (note the emphasis of late placed on the public display of the Commandments), the Christian principle that "*one cannot do evil that good abound*" applies all the more in this regard. The human life of the embryo (fertilized or cloned) is different from the lives of this Senate Committee membership only by degree, not by kind. A slippery slope is not only possible but probable, i.e., to deny the dignity of one level of human life, for strict utilitarian purposes, is to deny that dignity on other levels, for the PVS patients, for the retardate, for death row inmates, and, yes, even for the physically disabled who hope to gain reprieve by embryonic stem cell research.

The Catholic position is not to oppose stem cell research, but to oppose the destruction of human embryos for embryonic stem cell research purposes. Society must avoid turning over to science alone the most profound of decisions that define our present and the future of our culture and society. The technological

imperative cannot be allowed to override the moral imperative. We are called upon as a species and as a society to be "*life-giving*" not "*death-dealing*."

We urge your support and passage of HB 138.

Thank you for your attention and concern on this most important matter.

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