

I am writing to express my opposition to some of the recommendations contained in the Lockhart Review into Cloning of embryos for stem cell research.

Only 4 years ago both Houses of Parliament rejected cloning outright. In the space of that short time what has changed? In my understanding, nothing in terms of what embryonic cells have actually accomplished. However in that same time adult stem cells have been used in aiding in significant progress in the treatment of those who have serious illnesses or injuries. I am aware of many areas in which patients have benefited from the use of adult stem cells.

For example, the Washington Medical Centre in Seattle where doctors successfully treated 26 rapidly deteriorating multiple sclerosis patients with their own bone marrow stem cells. Of the 26, 6 improved and 20 stabilised. In Los Angeles a neurosurgeon harvested stem cells from the brain of a Parkinson's patient. The doctor cultured the cells and a small percentage of those cells matured into dopamine-secreting neurons. He injected 6 million cultured cells back into his patient's brain. One year later, the patient's symptoms were down by 83%. These results were known over 3 years ago; today such treatment is further advanced.

My source is an interview Joni Eareckson Tada conducted with Christianity Today (<http://www.ctlibrary.com/8943>), a major national magazine in the US in March 2003. Tada has served on numerous national bodies in that country in her experience as someone who has spent nearly 40 years in a wheelchair, yet who strongly opposes embryonic cell cloning.

I share her personal ethical and moral concerns, but even if others do not share the Christian understanding of the sacredness of life that experimentation on embryos violates, there are many other serious concerns with embryonic testing. Notably are the experiments with animals that have led to the development of tumours and mutations. Why spend the money to try and develop this unstable means of science, when much more could be done through the ethically sound and scientifically proven means of adult stem cell therapies?

I would add that it wasn't the uncertain science of 2002 that led Parliament to oppose cloning, but the ethical nightmare that cloning will doubtless eventually unleash. That ethical dilemma has not changed, namely the continued experimentation on and destruction of human life which begins at conception.

I am also deeply disturbed by the Lockhart proposal to combine animal and human cells in order to have sufficient eggs to experiment with. Such proposals, including multiple donors, are bizarre and so unnecessary when there is a better way forward that respects the God-given dignity of human life and the responsibility that each generation has to protect what has been given to it.

Doubtless great pressure will be exerted on members - but I for one would not wish it to be said of me in years to come, when cloning has been taken further, that I voted for it. The leaders of a nation have a God-given authority to exercise, one which the Bible makes very clear will require accountability. A conscience vote will need to reflect the conscience of members in the light of what God has shown of us that he requires. Micah chapter 6 verse 8 in the Old Testament, spells that out that Christian ethic of love and social responsibility, toward God and man, "He has showed you, O man, what is good.

And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God.

What sort of society do we want to provide for future generations? Our concern is rightful for the environment and animal world, but the lack of concern for humankind deeply disturbs me. The Judeo-Christian ethic is the underpinning of what makes Australia the free and tolerant society that we have - even to having such a debate. Yet we are willing to destroy those foundations upon which everything else we cherish has been built. It is a doorway to future social, moral and spiritual degradation.

I plead with you to report in the strongest opposition to these proposals.

Be assured of my ongoing prayerful concern and that of my people.

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