


# They Said, We Said

Denominational Statements on Human Cloning

*By John Brunt*



**I**t seems that every day I receive some missive in the mail from either the left or the right that rails against the Church for all it does wrong. In this article I want to commend the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its leadership for something that I believe it has done correctly.

The subject of human cloning and issues that arise from it have prompted several Christian denominations, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to comment on this topic. In this article I will examine some other denominational statements and then see how that of the Seventh-day Adventists compares.

These statements may be divided into three categories. First are statements that oppose human cloning as inherently wrong. Second are those that permanently oppose human cloning on pragmatic grounds. Finally, some oppose human cloning at present, but are open to its legitimacy at a time in the future when the procedure might be more safe.

**C**ategorical rejection of human cloning can be seen in statements by the Southern Baptists, Roman Catholic bishops, and the Church of Scotland.<sup>1</sup> The Southern Baptist statement makes reference to Genesis and argues, "Seeking to clone human beings signifies a spiritual and technological hubris on the part of man which aims to usurp God's prerogatives as Creator." The statement then concludes that there "are no morally acceptable reasons for cloning human beings."<sup>2</sup>

The Southern Baptist statement does open the possibility that in the future individual organs might be cloned for transplant, as long as no entire human person is ever cloned. In addition to this statement, the trustees of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention voted another on March 6, 1997, that concludes, "Be it further resolved that we call for all nations of the world to make efforts to prevent the cloning of any human being."<sup>3</sup>

In "Remarks in Response to News Reports on the Cloning of Mammals," issued by the secretariat for Pro-Life activities of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, the secretariat argued that children are to have real parents and not to be products we can manufacture. Children must be the fruit of parents' love. The report says, "Catholic teaching rejects the cloning of human beings, because this is not a worthy way to bring a human being into the world."<sup>4</sup>

On May 22, 1997, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland voted to reaffirm "belief in the basic dignity and uniqueness of each human being under God," and to "express the strongest possible opposition to the cloning of human beings and urge Her Majesty's Government to press for a comprehensive international treaty to ban it worldwide."<sup>5</sup>

In a supplementary report to this vote from the Society, Religion, and Technology Project of the Board of National Mission we read that "to clone human beings would be ethically unacceptable as a matter of principle. On principle, to replicate any human technologically is a violation of the basic dignity and uniqueness of each human being made in God's image, of what God has given to that individual and to no one else."<sup>6</sup>

Although some of the reasons given differ, all three of these statements oppose human cloning in principle. None recognizes any instances where cloning might be utilized legitimately either now or in the future. Cloning is wrong, period.

**B**y contrast, the statement prepared by the United Church of Christ attempts to affirm the work of scientists and recognizes that there might be situations, as in the case of infertile married couples, where cloning could be beneficial. In the end, however, the statement rejects cloning for three reasons.

At present the procedure in humans is not safe; a "child produced by cloning would suffer from an overwhelming burden of expectations"; and it is beneficial for children to have the genetic resources of two adults.<sup>7</sup> Thus, this statement, in contrast with the three above, rejects cloning for several pragmatic reasons, but does not oppose it in principle as inherently wrong.

**F**inally, there are two denominational statements that allow for the possibility of legitimate human cloning in the future, although the first of these, from the United Methodists Genetic Science Task force, is problematic in an interesting way.<sup>8</sup>

This task force was commissioned by the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society. Its statement, issued in May 1997, also affirms the benefits of science and technology. It opposes cloning at present, but affirms that if humans are ever cloned the clones should be treated as fully human with all the dignity and civil rights accorded to any other human.

The statement also urges "widespread discussion of issues related to cloning in public forums including churches," and pleads that research move slowly while these discussions sort out the important issues involved.<sup>9</sup>

Thus, the door is left open for the possibility of human cloning in the future, although nothing is spelled out about the nature of issues that would finally be resolved in order to open this door in actual practice.

The preface of the statement includes a caveat that the Task Force cannot speak for the United Methodist Church as a whole. Only the Methodist General Conference can do that. At the General Conference in May of 2000 in Cleveland, Ohio, it became obvious that the Task Force truly did not speak for the Church. By a vote of 809 to 15, the Methodist General Conference called "on all nations to ban human cloning and to identify appropriate government agencies to enforce the ban."<sup>10</sup>

Reasons given include the wasting of human embryos, use or abuse of people, exploitation of women, tearing the fabric of the family, compromising human distinctiveness, lessening genetic diversity, exploitation for corporate profit and/or personal gain, and invasion of privacy. Nevertheless, the Methodist General Conference did call for continued discussion.

When taken as a whole, however, this statement puts the United Methodist Church with the churches that oppose cloning on pragmatic grounds.

**O**nly one statement leaves the door open to some possible uses of cloning in the future and spells out the principles that would have to be met in order for cloning to be legitimate. This statement is "On Ethical Considerations Regarding Human Cloning," voted by the Seventh-day Adventist Annual Council in Brazil in October of 1998. (see pages 44-46, below.)

The statement lists ethical concerns and argues that, "At present, concern about physical harm to developing human lives is sufficient to rule out the use of this technology." Other concerns include the dignity and uniqueness of the cloned person, the undermining of family relationships, the danger of treating clones in a dehumanizing, utilitarian way, and the financial costs of such a procedure.

After listing the concerns, however, the statement adds this caveat, "Still, it is important that concerns about the abuses of a technology not blind us to the possibilities of using it to meet genuine human needs."

The statement then goes on to list seven ethical principles that should be considered if this technology is ever applied to human beings. They are protection of vulnerable human life, protection of human dignity, alleviating human suffering, family support, stewardship, truthfulness, and understanding creation.

On the basis of these principles the statement would allow human cloning in some instances within the

context of a marriage relationship as long as it can be done in a way consistent with these principles and does not involve third parties, such as surrogates.

An additional statement voted by the Executive Committee of the General Conference in Brazil suggests that situations such as a married couple suffering from a genetic disease or infertility where no other means of reproduction would be possible might be legitimate contexts for human cloning in the future.

I believe that this statement offers the best example of the kind of theological and ethical reasoning that should guide our Christian reflections on this topic. On the one hand, it avoids the dogmatic prohibitions that offer no reasons. On the other, it provides positive principles that might guide us in knowing how to decide the matter thoughtfully. In addition, it is the only statement that applies biblical principles to the issue of human cloning.

If I am correct, how is it that Adventists have been so fortunate as to have produced the best example of ethical and theological reflection on the topic of human cloning? It is not an accident. Church leadership had the foresight to involve theologians, ethicists, attorneys, and medical personnel, along with administrators, pastors, and other church leaders, in an interdisciplinary committee that met for over a decade and discussed ethical questions that involve human life.

The committee was called the Christian View of Human Life Committee, and it met from 1989 to 2000. For an account of the first two years of this committee's work you can read an article in the August 1991, *Spectrum*, by attorney Margaret McFarland, who was a member.

There were several ground rules that helped this group do its work so well. One was that every side of every issue would be given a hearing. Discussion was open and civil. One member of the committee with whom I spoke gave much of the credit for this to Albert Whiting, a physician and director of the Medical Department of the General Conference.

Another feature of the committee was that a majority of its members were women. It also tended to have experts in the field write the drafts that were then considered and revised by the group as a whole. For instance, the draft of the statement on cloning was written by two individuals from Loma Linda University, Gerald Winslow, a theologian and ethicist, and Anthony Zuccarelli, a researcher in genetics in the School of Medicine.

This methodology of relying on shared, interdisciplinary wisdom has produced a whole series of statements on bioethical topics that should serve as a model for the

positive results of open theological and biblical reflection.

For this, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to be commended.

## Notes and References

1. "Statement on Human Cloning," by Richard D. Land, available on the Web at <[www.eric.com/President/1997/LJ-AClone.htm](http://www.eric.com/President/1997/LJ-AClone.htm)>; Richard M. Doerflinger, "Remarks in Response to News Reports on the Cloning of Mammals," Ronald Cole-Turner, ed., *Human Cloning: Religious Responses* (Louisville, Westminster John Knox, 1997), 142. General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and Supplementary Report to the General Assembly, "Motions on Cloning," in *ibid.*, 138-41.
2. Land, "Statement on Human Cloning," 1.
3. "Resolution on Cloning" by Trustees of the Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, in Cole-Turner, ed., 146.
4. Doerflinger, "Remarks," 142.
5. Church of Scotland, "Motions on Cloning," 138.
6. *Ibid.*, 141.
7. "Statement on Cloning," by the United Church of Christ Committee on Genetics, in Cole-Turner, ed., 147-51. The quotation appears on page 149.
8. "Statement from the United Methodist Genetic Science Task Force," in Cole-Turner, ed., 143-45.
9. *Ibid.*, 144.
10. See <[www.gc2000.org/pets/pet/text/p30530.asp](http://www.gc2000.org/pets/pet/text/p30530.asp)> for the full text.

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