



## AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

October 11, 2006

### **A statement from the Australian Catholic Bishops on human embryo cloning and destructive embryo experimentation**

#### **Human Embryo Research: A New Controversy**

The Australian parliament and the wider community are engaged in a very important debate over whether to allow human embryos to be deliberately created and then destroyed for scientific research.

In particular, proposals now before the Federal Parliament seek to radically revise the decision taken by the same parliament in 2002, to prevent human cloning.

This has been prompted in part by a review of the legislation chaired by the late Justice John Lockhart, which recommended the lifting of almost all of the existing ethical and legislative constraints in this area.

The Catholic Church is not opposed to stem cell research. On the contrary, we are strong supporters of research based on adult stem cells, as well as those which are derived from umbilical cord blood. Our Church supports ethical stem cell research through its research institutes, healthcare services, teaching hospitals and health professionals.

#### **Old debate: New dangers**

In 2002, the Federal Parliament passed legislation allowing embryonic stem cell lines to be extracted from viable human embryos 'left over' from the IVF process.

At that time, we warned that the Government had crossed a new and dangerous line by creating an expendable class of human life. The evidence of this is now sadly clear in the legislation currently before the Parliament.

These new Bills seek to take us from using 'spare' human embryos, created for reproduction, to creating a new class of human embryos, never to be used for reproduction, but only for research.

This is a complete reversal of the Parliament's decision in 2002, which unanimously rejected human embryo cloning.

Since 2002 there have been no significant scientific developments to justify more permissive legislation and no change in the fundamental ethical issues.

## **Creation for Destruction: An Ethical Minefield**

The destruction of viable human embryos, however they are created, is never to be condoned. These new Bills, however, create a new contempt for life by:

- Creating embryos purely for the purpose of destruction, further dehumanising the human embryo.
- Introducing new categories of human embryos, including clones and embryos with mixed DNA.

Introducing cloning and the mixing of human and animal genetic material into this field of research only compounds the promotion of curiosity over ethics. Similarly, using deceptive terms such as ‘therapeutic’ cloning where no such therapies exist is misleading and harmful.

We were all embryos once. Within those cells which comprise the embryo, lies all the genetic information which is essential to the people that we are today. The human embryo cannot continue to develop as anything other than a human being. Therefore, it has intrinsic human dignity and should be afforded that most basic of human rights – the right to live, to grow, to prosper. To create a human embryo with the express purpose of destroying it for research is to enter into a dangerous and perverse form of human experimentation.

### **A common humanity**

This is not a religious argument. We do not argue against destructive experimentation on embryos simply because we are Catholic, but because of basic human values. As a society we cannot seek to alleviate the suffering of some people by creating and then killing human life.

All of us wish to find cures and treatments for disease or genetic conditions. Many Australians are afflicted by terrible suffering and we share with them the hope for a cure or effective treatment. But allowing scientists open slather on human embryos for research is not the way forward.

We pray that in the upcoming conscience votes on this issue, our federal parliamentarians will consider the impact such changes would have, and reject scientific experimentation on that most precious and vulnerable of our brothers and sisters, the human embryo.