

Cardinal criticizes idea of fatherless babies in bill

LONDON – A British cardinal has criticized proposals to allow lesbians to become joint legal parents of children created for them through in vitro fertilization.

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor of Westminster said Nov. 19 that provisions in the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill were “profoundly wrong.”

In a letter to *The Times*, a London newspaper, the cardinal said: “The bill proposes to remove the need for IVF providers to take into account the child’s need for a father when considering an IVF application and to confer legal parenthood on people who have no biological relationship to a child born as a result of IVF.

“This radically undermines the place of the father in a child’s life and makes the natural rights of the child subordinate to the desires of the couple,” he said. “It is profoundly wrong.”

Under the proposals such children will have no legal fathers because the partner of the mother will be registered as the “second parent.” Critics say it is the first time that the fathers of children will not be recognized in some way by the British government.

One Catholic politician, Iain Duncan Smith, said Nov. 18 that the bill represented the “last nail in the coffin for the traditional family” in Britain.

Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor’s comments were timed to coincide with the second reading of the bill in the House of Lords Nov. 19. It was the first time the bill was debated by lawmakers since it was introduced in the House of Lords earlier in November. The bill must progress through the House of Lords and the House of Commons, where it should arrive in February, before it can become law.

In his letter, Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor said the bill could be used to change the current abortion law, and he recommended it be changed to make it harder to procure an abortion. The current law “is only one aspect of what needs to change” if

Britain's annual tally of 200,000 abortions – one of the highest in Europe – is to be reduced significantly.

Catholic leaders in Scotland issued a statement Nov. 18 expressing their fears that the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill would be hijacked by pro-abortion politicians to make access to abortion easier.

"The HFE bill should not in any way be used to increase abortion, but if the matter is addressed it must only be to provide measures which dramatically reduce this social ill and contribute to creating a society more sensitive to the rights and value of human life," said a statement from Cardinal Keith O'Brien of St. Andrews and Edinburgh and Archbishop Mario Conti of Glasgow.

They said they had informed British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, a Scot, of their worry that the proposals on in vitro fertilization for lesbian couples would "diminish the natural status of fathers and disturb the natural bonds between parents and children."

Currently, lesbians and single women are permitted to receive fertility treatment, but the law says consideration must be given to the right of the child for a father. The new bill, devised to bring British law up to date with the pace of biotechnological advances in the last 20 years, abolishes this requirement.

The bill would legalize the creation of chimeras, formed when animal cells are added to human embryos. It also would legalize the creation of "savior siblings," or "spare-part" or "designer" babies, for tissue transplants.

It offers a loophole to relax the ban on cloning and would double the time embryos can be kept in storage.

The parliamentary debate Nov. 19 was suspended when Lord Brennan, a Catholic, collapsed shortly after delivering his speech criticizing the bill.

The 65-year-old Labor politician was given a heart massage by the federal health minister, Lord Darzi. Paramedics arrived to take Lord Brennan to a London hospital, where he was later described as stable.