

Human cloning: Why is it immoral?

Most people instinctively shudder when they learn that human cloning is currently legal in Maryland. But the definition of cloning, and why the church teaches that it is immoral, may not be clear.

A human clone is a manufactured person, a genetic copy of another individual. He/she is made as follows. Take an egg from a woman's ovary; remove the egg's DNA and discard it. Obtain a cell from the person to be cloned, and remove the DNA from this donor cell – but don't discard it. Insert the DNA from the donor cell into the egg, replacing the egg's DNA. Use an electrical pulse to cause cell division to begin, and a cloned embryo, a new human life, has been created.

This new person has no mother or father. Instead of being a unique person, as happens when genetic material from a man and a woman are blended through fertilization of an egg by sperm, all of his/her genetic information came from one person, the person who was cloned. That's why a clone is a genetic copy of someone else.

Sometimes terms such as “reproductive” or “therapeutic” cloning are used. But these arbitrary terms have no basis in science. Scientists define human cloning as the creation of a human embryo through cloning, described above. Once the cloned embryo is created, subsequent actions are irrelevant. Cloning ends with the creation of the embryo. So whether the clone is killed and dissected, referred to as “therapeutic cloning,” or implanted in a woman's uterus and allowed to develop, referred to as “reproductive cloning,” the unnatural manufacture of a human embryo using the cloning process occurred.

Human cloning is morally wrong because it undermines the dignity of the human person. Instead of cooperating with God's will to procreate through the conjugal act of marriage, cloning involves the creation of human life according to scientists' will and predetermined specifications. The creation of human life is reduced to a manufacturing process.

There is little interest in allowing a clone to develop through a complete pregnancy

to birth. Human embryos manufactured by cloning are created exclusively so they can be killed in experiments. Clones are created so their body parts may be used by others. Cloning treats human life as a commodity, another reason that human cloning is immoral.

Last year, the Maryland legislature claimed to pass a law that prohibits cloning, but the definition of cloning written into law is not scientifically accurate. Maryland law defines human cloning as “the replication of a human being ... in order to allow development beyond an embryo.” Human life is called an embryo from conception through the eighth week of gestation, and called a fetus from the ninth week until birth. So Maryland enacted a law that forbids allowing a cloned human embryo to live past the eighth week. This is not a human cloning ban, but a ban on allowing a cloned human embryo to live.

Don't be fooled by claims that Maryland bans human cloning. Maryland law allows the creation of cloned embryos, and allows the clones to be grown through the eighth week of pregnancy. If you'd prefer that Maryland not permit such gruesome experiments, contact your Maryland senator and delegates and urge them to support the “Human Cloning Prohibition Act of 2007.” Addresses, phone numbers and e-mail addresses of legislators can be found on the Web site of the Maryland Catholic Conference, www.mdcathcon.org; click on “Find your legislator” on the left side of the home page.

This article is part of an ongoing series from the Archdiocesan Respect Life Committee, of which Nancy Fortier Paltell is the chair.