

Vatican official condemns cloning of human embryos

VATICAN CITY - A Vatican official condemned the reported cloning of human embryos and said the idea of using them to produce "personalized" therapeutic stem cells was morally illicit and pointless.

Such cloning represents "the worst type of exploitation of the human being," Bishop Elio Sgreccia, president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, told Vatican Radio Jan. 18.

"As for the possible justification that this would be used to provide therapy, up to now there's been no success at this, and even if there were, it would not be permissible to use the human being as a medicine," Bishop Sgreccia said.

The California biotech company Stemagen reported Jan. 17 that it had cloned the embryos from adult skin cells. The company is interested in developing clones of patients, from which stem cells could then be harvested to grow replacement tissue.

Five of the embryos were said to have been grown to an advanced stage, to the point that they could have been implanted in a womb. Company officials emphasized that they were not interested in creating cloned babies.

Bishop Sgreccia said that using embryos to produce stem cells already is outdated, given recent advances in making stem cells without creating an embryo.

In that sense, he said, human cloning has lost "even the pretext" of therapeutic justification.