

Religious Viewpoints on Cloning

In 1997, the President's National Bioethics Advisory Commission (NBAC) received a broad range of religious views from Jewish, Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Islamic leaders, and issued a report that showed an overwhelming majority of the religious leaders who participated in NBAC's research into the social, legal, and ethical implications of cloning were opposed to human cloning.¹

Representatives of the great majority of American Christians agree that a comprehensive ban on human cloning is needed, since cloning embryos for research or for purposes of pregnancy and live birth subverts human dignity. This near consensus view is notable in its inclusion of the Roman Catholic Church, the Southern Baptist Convention (the largest protestant denomination) and the United Methodist Church that is strongly pro-choice in its view of abortion.

The official opinion of the Roman Catholic Church is that "every possible act of cloning humans is intrinsically evil" and unjustifiable.² Roman Catholics opined that because cloned humans are created in the image of existing people instead of created by a "unique creative act of God," cloning is an affront to human dignity. Further, Roman Catholics believe that cloning objectifies children and would "jeopardize the unique and personal identity of the clone (or clones) as well as the person whose genome was thus duplicated."³ Roman Catholics also oppose research cloning because even if cloning could ease the suffering of infertile individuals or those with life-threatening illnesses, [the Church opined that] the ends cannot justify using inherently immoral technology.⁴

Some liberal Protestant theologians interpret the Bible's creation story to mean that humans have a responsibility to "participate with God in shaping a better future,"⁵ and expressed "qualified support" for live-birth and research cloning.⁶ [Specifically, conservative Protestant scholars opined that research cloning "contravened basic notions of personhood," while other Protestants noted the medical benefits and therefore advocated regulation, rather than prohibition, of research cloning.]⁷

Islamic attitudes regarding human cloning are in flux, with more liberal Muslims tending to adopt liberal western attitudes to bioethics in general, and therefore are open to research cloning; while more conservative Islamic thinkers are entirely opposed. One Islamic scholar stressed a view reflective of the Jewish divine "partnership" view, and found that one "could view cloning research, and perhaps even cloning humans in some circumstances, as using human creative potential for good."⁸

Jewish scholars consulted by NBAC took the position that "cloning humans could conceivably be justified in some circumstances, however few they may be."⁹ The position is largely based on historical tradition and writings that focus on human destiny. For example, the Jewish tradition emphasizes that man is in a partnership with God, and obligated to care for humankind. However, many regard cloning of a family member as more acceptable than donor insemination or egg donation, which raise concerns over consanguineous relationships.¹⁰ Rabbi Elliot Dorff summarized the Jewish view: "The

Jewish demand that we do our best to provide healing makes it important that we take advantage of the promise of cloning to aid us in finding cures for a variety of diseases and in overcoming infertility" with supervision and some restrictions.¹¹

¹ See generally National Bioethics Advisory Commission, Cloning Human Beings, 1, 39-61 (1997) ("NBAC Report").

² See NBAC Report, at 54.

³ See NBAC Report, at 49, 50.

⁴ See NBAC Report, at 54, 55.

⁵ See NBAC Report, at 48.

⁶ See NBAC Report, at 42.

⁷ See NBAC Report, at 42.

⁸ See NBAC Report at 46.

⁹ See NBAC Report, at 54. See also Rabbi Michael J. Broyde, "Cloning People and Jewish Law: A Preliminary Analysis," available at <http://www.jlaw.com/Articles/cloning.html> (last visited June 3, 2004).

¹⁰ See NBAC Report, at 54.

¹¹ See NBAC Report, at 56.