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On Human Cloning

Before the Subcommittee on Science, Technology, and Space
Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
U.S. Senate
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We are pleased to testify on the issue of cloning before this committee. We note with appreciation that the legislation introduced by Subcommittee Chair Senator Brownback is legislation that supports the principles on cloning adopted by The United Methodist Church.

The General Conference of The United Methodist Church is the only church body that speaks for the entire 8.4 million-member United Methodist Church. One year ago, in May 2000, the General Conference called *“for a ban on all human cloning, including the cloning of human embryos. This would include all projects, privately or governmentally funded, that are intended to advance human cloning.”* (The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church, 2000, p. 254)

The General Conference based its position on the work of the United Methodist Genetic Science Task Force, which began its work in 1989, some 8 years before a Scottish laboratory succeeded in cloning “Dolly”.

Since the cloning of Dolly, this issue of cloning has sparked enormous and sustained concern in the general public, including the church. Many other denominations other than the United Methodist Church have also issued statements opposing human cloning. The United Methodist Church opposition to cloning comes from our understanding of a theology of God’s creation and how humans are to be stewards of God’s creation. The new biological technologies, including cloning, force us to examine as never before, the meaning of life, our understanding of ourselves as humans, and our proper role in God’s creation. The General Conference *“caution(s) that the prevalent principle in research that what can be done should be done is insufficient rationale ...and should not be the prevalent principle guiding the development of new technologies...technologies need moral and ethical guidance.”* (Book of Resolutions, p. 248)

As United Methodists, our reflections on these issues emerge from our faith. We remember that creation has its origin, value, and destiny in God, that humans are stewards of creation, and that technology has brought both great benefit and harm to creation. As people of faith, we believe that our identity as humans is more than our genetic inheritance, our social environment, or the sum of the two. We are created by God and have been redeemed by Jesus Christ. In light of these theological claims and other questions, fears and expectations, we recognize that our present human knowledge on this issue is incomplete and finite. We do not know all of the consequences of cloning...it is important that the limits of human knowledge be considered as policy is made. (Book of Resolutions, p.254)

Dr. Rebekah Miles, associate professor of ethics, at Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University and a member of the United Methodist Task Force on Genetic Science summarized the questions asked by our taskforce.

Will human cloning compromise our God-given uniqueness or distinctiveness?

How might human cloning be misused by sinful humans to further their selfish ends and objectify other people?

Is a desire to replicate one's genetic inheritance in a human clone an attempt to deny our inevitable finitude as human beings?

Will human cloning further social injustice...?

When does human alteration of creation go so far as to become a violation of God's creation?

What is the difference between our human capacities for creation and God's?

Our Genetic Science Task Force concluded that cloning would compromise human distinctiveness, that it would be used as a way to further social injustice, and was a violation of their understanding of God's Creation and as such should be banned.

The General Conference statement on human cloning notes a number of ways that human cloning would have social and theological ramifications: *(the) use and abuse of people, exploitation of women, (the) tearing of the fabric of the family, the compromising of human distinctiveness, the lessening of genetic diversity, the direction of research and development (on cloning would likely be)...controlled by corporate profit ...*(Book of Resolutions, p. 254) The General Conference further noted that *Given the profound theological and moral implications, the imperfection of human knowledge that there be a moratorium on cloning-related research.*

The most difficult choices we face are often to do good the wrong way.

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness by the devil to do several "good" things: To turn stone into bread; to throw himself from the temple so that angels would save him and show the glory of God; to become an earthly ruler. Jesus resisted these temptations.

The temptations offered by those who would clone human embryos and humans are profound. They suggest by these technologies alone will serious diseases be solved. Cloning human embryos was first presented as essential to providing enough stem cells for research, but we are learning every day that new adult stem cells are being found. Be wary of the temptation to adopt today's latest technology as the final understanding of God's ways of creating and healing humans.

Cloning proponents will argue that cloning will soon be come a normal way of reproducing humans and that initial opposition will fade away when safety concerns are addressed. The cloning of human humans should never be allowed to become "normal". The US Congress has the opportunity to join with many other countries where the United Methodist Church has members and ban human cloning. The rest of the world is looking to the United States for leadership on this issue. The US Congress, moreover, should not take halfway measures with regard to cloning. Some have argued that banning the reproduction of a human clone is sufficient and that cloning of human embryos should not be banned. We would urge you to both ban the cloning of human embryos and to prohibit the patenting of human embryos. To allow the production of cloned human embryos makes it highly likely that any ban on reproductive cloning would be easily violated.