

# Tentatio December 2001 - A Response to Human Cloning

The recent announcement by a Massachusetts research firm that they had cloned a human embryo appears to be a publicity stunt perhaps intended to gain financial advantage in the marketplace. The six-celled human embryo did not survive long enough to make it a viable source of stem cells. Scientists the world over, include Nobel prize winner Paul Berg of Stanford University, denounced it as being of little significance. Although this ought to dispel the idea that human cloning is just around the corner, it is disturbing that, in the debate that followed, a distinction has been made popular between what is being called "therapeutic cloning" and "reproductive cloning." Although polls indicate that 90% of Americans are against reproductive cloning, the truth is that therapeutic cloning cares even less for the embryo it creates, intending from the beginning to destroy it in the name of research.

The only appealing argument for therapeutic cloning is the assumed benefit to sick and injured people. The assumption is that science can do anything if given enough time and raw material to work with. But the raw material in this case is a human life. Those who somehow define away the humanity of this life stand on sentimental rather than scientific ground. Science is interested in this embryonic stem cell precisely because it is human life. It is the same human life that we began with in our mother's womb. The fact that this new technology claims to be different since it is acquired through cloning is merely playing with language. Advertisers and marketing people have long known that you can sell any idea if you give it the right spin, the right name. Euphemism that makes the wrong sound like the right is, in a court of law, to not "tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth." A human embryo by any other name is a human embryo, that is, a human being. As in the issue of abortion, as in the issue of discarding left over embryos in fertility clinics, as in research that destroys a human embryo, and as in cloning for therapeutic purposes, it is the life of a human being that is being sacrificed.

For those whose life is centered in God the Father, maker of heaven and earth; God the Son, redeemer of mankind; God the Holy Spirit, sanctifier of those redeemed, it is clear that all human life is life for whom Christ died. In a fallen world life is cheap, life is exploited, life is "used" by others, and it is for these and other reasons that God sent his Son to redeem the world. We who believe and live by that Gospel can live with the limitations God places on us even in doing research to help others, because it is not our first task to solve all the ills of this life. Our first task is to live faithfully as Christ's holy people, learning to step aside where God chooses to intervene because we have reached the limits of what it means to be creature rather than Creator. And if God does not intervene to remove all our ills, then we live by faith in the joy that surpasses human understanding