NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Cloning for Dollars

Phyllis Zagano | May. 22, 2013 Just Catholic

There?s money in them thar Petri dishes. Now the folks at Oregon Health and Science University are using skin cells scraped off dead babies to make matching embryos. This is not science fiction. It is real.

They used to do it with monkeys.

It?s called somatic cell nuclear transfer. Here is how it works: First you get a human egg, or ovum. Then you get someone who needs a cure. Next you take the egg?s nucleus -- its DNA control center -- out. Get a DNA-packed nucleus from a skin cell and put it in the egg. Heat and watch. Kill the new embryo after a few days to get its stem cells. Grow them. Call a press conference. Hope for a Nobel Prize.

Am I the only person on the planet who has read *Brave New World*? No matter how you cut it, we?re talking test tube babies here. The gross-out factor aside (the Oregon folks first used monkey eggs and human cell nuclei) there is something very strange about this new science.

Each of us has a specific set of internal marching orders for our bodies. Our DNA essentially controls how we grow, what we look like, and what diseases we are prey to. The big targets for the cloning crowd seem to be incurable diseases, like Parkinson?s and diabetes. Ethics aside, I cannot for the life of me figure out how cloning someone with a genetically-based disease will help matters.

The objective of this sort of cloning -- they call it ?therapeutic? or ?research? cloning -- is to make a stem cell match. That being the case, why would anyone want to create stem cells pre-programmed for the very diseases they are trying to cure?

Oh, no, the scientists chorus, we can fix that, too. We can manipulate that little embryo and take out the nasty gene or two. Besides, we have other uses for those stem cells. We can make new skin cells for burns, new bone cells for broken legs, new lung, liver, and pancreas cells for damaged organs.

Maybe someday but not yet.

The promises of cloning science are just that: promises. Big promises. So it?s OK to pay young women to take a bunch of hormones and undergo dangerous and painful procedure to extract their eggs? They get about ten eggs each time. The odds are not great. You would need about 180 million eggs to farm enough stem cells to cure the 18 million diabetics in the US alone.

Still, they promise. I?ve heard it called ?junk science.? I am told there have been no cures using such cloned cells.

What works is adult stem cell therapy. Bone marrow has a blood stem cell that can help out in all sorts of blood conditions. Umbilical cord blood has adult stem cells. There are lots of others floating around inside you, and non-cloning scientists are trying to figure out how to use them.

They?re also trying to force adult cells back to stem cell status and then use them. They are called induced pluripotent stem cells and they have no ethical complications. No eggs, no embryo. For that they gave Shinya Yamanaka and John Gurdon the 2012 Nobel Prize for Physiology or Medicine.

We need to wake up. This is important. For most of us, it?s a confusing mess with lots of big words that make no sense. What comes out the media grinder about ?therapeutic? cloning is a sausage of hope -- promises for cures, promises for health, and promises for life.

But when it is clearly explained that these experiments form -- and kill -- human beings, most folks just say no. (A 2010 research survey conducted on behalf of the U.S. bishops? conference found 76 percent of adults said that scientists should not be allowed [1] to use human cloning to create a supply of human embryos to be destroyed in medical research.)

And that?s the bottom line. We do not need modern Victor Frankensteins to create creatures -- even the tiniest embryos -- for our own wants and needs. Nor should we support such creations with either free-market or tax dollars.

Yet it is happening and it will continue. And you can be sure those tailor-made cloned stem cells will sell for huge amounts of money, while the scientists will spend a lot of time going to the bank.

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