

Korean cloning feat stirs religious concern: First successfully cloned human embryo

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News that South Korean scientists have successfully cloned the first human embryo in order to extract stem cells for medical research has drawn sharp criticism from religious and ethical groups in the U.S. and abroad.

Stem cells are the universal cells, harvested from embryos or adult tissues, that scientists hope can someday be developed into replacement organs for rejection-free transplants, or used to cure spinal cord injuries and neurological diseases such as Parkinson's.

Religious groups, including the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops and Focus on the Family, sharply criticized the cloning breakthrough. Cloning opponents say creating embryos marked for destruction once stem cells have been removed is ethically troubling, and they fear cloning will lead to "designer babies" and embryo screening.

"While touted as scientific progress, this is a sign of moral regress. Human cloning turns procreation into a manufacturing process," said Cardinal William Keeler, chairman of the Committee for Pro-Life Activities of the bishops conference. The Vatican also condemned the cloning, with Pope John Paul's bioethics adviser comparing it to the medical experiments done by Nazis in World War II concentration camps.

The U.S. House of Representatives voted to ban human cloning last year, but debate in the Senate is stalled on whether an exception for stem cell research should be added.

The National Council of Churches announced that it is creating a Human Genetics Policy Development Committee. "A majority of Christians would have some reservations about the unbridled application of technologies to human life in ways that alter the nature of human life itself," said Eileen Lindner, NCC deputy general

secretary for research and planning. –*Religion News Service*