

TURNING THE TIME OVER TO...

Courtney Campbell

PROPHECY AND CITIZENRY:
THE CASE OF HUMAN CLONING

In 1997, researchers successfully cloned mammals and made human cloning a real possibility. What are the religious implications? How should Mormons respond?

THE YEAR IS 2007. MORE THAN FIVE years of research on human embryos that have not been transferred to a womb (research preceded by several years of successful implantation in primates) have indicated that nuclear transfer cloning technology in humans is scientifically possible. Researchers believe it very likely to produce children at not greater risk of physiological abnormality than those produced by other technologically assisted methods of reproduction.

The Genetics and Reproductive Medicine

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Institute in Ourtown, Virginia, has been at the center of this research. To date, no cloned embryos have been transferred to a womb to establish a pregnancy.

June and Jerry Smith (ages thirty-three and thirty-one respectively) visit the Institute seeking help. Some years previously, Jerry had experienced a cancer that, coupled with subsequent chemotherapy, has rendered him sterile. Because of the sudden onset of the condition and the medical treatments, the couple were unable to have any of Jerry's sperm retrieved for purposes of artificial insemination.

The couple want an expression of their loving relationship. June, who has never been pregnant, wishes to bear a child herself, but they have both concluded that neither one would be comfortable

with a child resulting from anonymous sperm donation.

Learning of the Institute's research, they request the research team to utilize June's eggs and a somatic cell from Jerry to produce a child for them. No laws are in place barring private facilities like the Institute from performing such a procedure.¹

THE preceding scenario seems the stuff of science fiction, or at least the cover page of the *National Enquirer*. Nonetheless, announcements by researchers in February and March 1997 indicate that what is science fiction may soon become scientific reality and eventually clinically available. A team of Scottish researchers reported in late February 1997 that they had successfully cloned a sheep, whom they named "Dolly" after Dolly Parton, from a somatic (or body) cell of another sheep. A week later, researchers in Oregon reported the successful embryo cloning of rhesus monkeys, "Neti" and "Ditto."

These reports raised the prospect that human cloning was no longer technically beyond the realm of scientific possibility. Indeed, the head of both research teams indicated to the media that their procedures could be used to clone humans, although each expressed that it would be "offensive" or "repugnant" to do so.

Still, science doesn't always follow the dictates of ethics, and the prospect of human cloning caught the attention of President Bill Clinton, who indicated that such research raised serious matters of morality and spirituality. The President (1) imposed a temporary moratorium on federal sponsorship of research to produce a human clone; (2) asked for voluntary compliance from the private sector; and, (3) requested that the National Bioethics Advisory Commission (NBAC) prepare recommendations by early June on the shape of U.S. public policy on human cloning research.

NBAC initiated a public hearings process in early March 1997 and also requested scholarly papers on the science, theology, ethics, and laws regarding human cloning. I was invited to prepare the study on religious perspectives. The following week, a member of the LDS church's Public Affairs Office called to ask if I would be interested in providing my thoughts on whether the Church should make a public statement on the controversy, and on the content of such a statement. Church President Gordon B. Hinckley had already encountered media questions on the subject.²

Here is the story of my role in these re-

lated endeavors—the Federal commission and the Church's position. This episode raises questions about how we as a religious people are to be involved in influencing the public discussion of ethical issues. Just how should we be light, salt, and leaven to, on, and in the world? This is an issue we haven't yet really addressed in our history, and now, with our increased prominence, it is a question we need to confront. Consider my experience.

POLICY AND ECCLESIASTICAL RATIONALES

Questions of genetic testing and engineering haven't been voiced by LDS scholars. But as human genome research continues, such questions will inevitably appear in LDS literature.

SHORTLY after the research announcements on cloning, and the enormous media attention these studies received, some major religious denominations, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, the Orthodox Church in America, and the Roman Catholic Church rushed forward with statements of condemnation, some

more and some less thoughtfully articulated. The media helped to stimulate public imagination by portraying the cloning controversy as a conflict between religion and science. This is a major oversimplification, but it at least opened public forums to religious concerns. The NBAC, charged with making policy recommendations for a public comprising in part citizens who are also religious believers, was obliged to acknowledge these religious sentiments and issues. Besides President Clinton's concerns about the spiritual challenges of cloning and public discussion about whether scientific research on human cloning involved "playing God," there was a philosophical rationale for the Federal commission to request a study of religious issues implicit in human cloning.

In the 1960s, a fairly vigorous debate had occurred in theological bioethics about the prospects of human cloning. Instigated by the writings of Nobel Laureate Joshua Lederberg, this debate concerned a scientific rationale for pursuing human cloning in order to save an endangered species, namely, the human race. Lederberg and other scientists had become concerned about "genetic overload"; that is, because of an excessive

number of deleterious genes carried in the human gene pool, the species was at risk of dying out at some future time. Human reproduction with babies carrying preferred genes, rather than those conferred by the lottery of life, was viewed as a means to avoid species extinction.

This proposal was greeted with both alarm and celebration among members of the theological community. One prominent Episcopalian ethicist, Joseph Fletcher, argued that cloning should be the preferred mode of reproduction because it reflected distinctive human features, including rational control, deliberation, and choice. Others were equally critical; Methodist theologian Paul Ramsey argued that however scientifically appealing, human cloning would be dehumanizing, because it assaulted the meaning of parenthood, transformed "procreation" into "reproduction," involved non-therapeutic research on the unborn, and reflected sinful human aspirations to become a creator God.

My point here is that religious thought on cloning already had some initial credibility and legitimacy for NBAC; indeed, in some sense, the cloning announcements did not necessarily mean ethics racing to keep up with science, as is often the case, but science catching up with theological imagination. In contrast, there is no similar historical discussion of cloning, or even genetic technologies for that matter, within the LDS community. Ecclesiastical leaders have refrained from giving direct counsel on issues of genetic screening, testing, or engineering, and (with some notable exceptions³) such questions have not seemed to command the attention of LDS scholars. Such issues are of course raised for members who may confront them when a fetus is diagnosed with a genetic abnormality or when a family history of, for example, breast cancer leads a physician to recommend a genetic test to determine predispositions to a late-onset disease. I suspect, however, that as research on the human genome continues, as more markers for disease are identified, questions of human genetics will inevitably find their way into LDS literature, both ecclesiastical and scholarly.

RELIGION AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP

What values do we want the United States to uphold—morally, economically, spiritually?

THIS lack of an LDS voice was somewhat unfortunate, because unlike previous Federal commissions in medical ethics which have been rather dismissive of religious voices, NBAC seemed



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“Human cloning raises questions about Latter-day Saints influencing public discussion of ethical issues. What can we do to be salt and leaven to the world?”

genuinely committed to an inclusive dialogue with religious traditions. An Islamic scholar testified before the commission, a policy first. And the commission had requested me to study and summarize the views of various religious communities besides Jewish and Christian denominations, including African American, American Indian, Hindu, and Buddhist. Each of these communities has a distinctive religious context within which to situate human cloning and a distinctive religious voice by which to articulate concerns and positions.

Let me briefly recapitulate some of the claims that arise from these religious traditions.

First, a moral issue—even something apparently as breathtakingly new as mammalian cloning—will be set within a social context and history. It is very difficult, for example, to appreciate the distrust and moral suspicion with which cloning and many genetic interventions are viewed within the African-American community without situating these attitudes within an historical legacy of abuse, exploitation, and violation of African Americans by medical research.

Second, moral issues may be constructively approached through analogy, story, and narrative. Some American Indians and Hindu scholars, for example, thought it rather presumptuous that “Dolly” was heralded as a new creation. Many of the foundational creation narratives for American Indians and in the Hindu tradition portray the creation of humanity from divine beings in a manner that looks very close to a cloning process. In this respect, theological narratives might anticipate scientific developments rather than being viewed as reactive and anachronistic.

Third, promoting forms of scientific inquiry such as cloning, either for opening lines of promising medical research or for lining the pockets of biotechnological firms, may nonetheless represent a radical distortion of societal priorities. Funding and research

allocated to cloning can mean diminished attention to chronic diseases that afflict members of the African American community, for example. It may also reflect, as Hindu and Buddhist scholars contend, a misguided attempt to resolve metaphysical issues (about the purpose of parenting or the origins of the soul, etc.) through medical means.

PROPHECY AND CITIZENRY

The LDS church grapples with its response to human cloning.

MIGHT the LDS tradition also have some prophetic words to offer to policy formulation on cloning? Certainly, LDS thought offers some distinctive theological claims about the religious issues NBAC addressed in its deliberations, including the nature of family, procreation, and parenting; the meaning of the biblical concept of the “image of God”; the purpose of human life; or the vocation of scientific inquiry. It is, of course, most common for these issues to be presented in personalized proselyting, but I don’t think the traditional format precludes a different religious witness to the state. Moreover, when the state has invited such a witness as part of an attempt to reflect societal diversity in a democratic society, it can be argued that part of what is entailed by responsible citizenship is to participate in the public forum.

I would like to think that something like this might have been in the minds of those in the Church Public Affairs in early March 1997, but I suspect theological bewilderment might better characterize the situation. Public Affairs was contemplating issuing a

statement on behalf of the general authorities, and considering (1) whether to issue such a statement and (2) what the statement should contain.

Should the Church issue some kind of position statement? When Public Affairs contacted me, they were at pains to remind me that the Brethren typically do not take public stands on policy questions, unless they are directly connected to the tripartite mission of the Church (preaching the gospel, redeeming the dead, perfecting the Saints) or otherwise implicated a deep-rooted moral issue. Moreover, such statements were typically very brief and, following the pattern on display in the *General Handbook of Instructions*, offered conclusions for practical decisions without any supporting theological argument or rationale. So, they made clear to me that what was not going to happen was an official statement along the lines of a papal encyclical. Indeed, if any statement were offered, it was hoped a couple of sentences would suffice.

I argued that there were solid reasons for issuing a statement, and a more substantive statement than was being contemplated. On theological grounds, I suggested, there were some values of profound importance to the Church that were implicated in the cloning discussion. For example, the “Proclamation on the Family” affirms convictions about the family, about human sexuality, and about parenting that do not sit comfortably with human cloning.

I also proposed pragmatic reasons for issuing a statement. I would soon be calling the Church, as I was with virtually every other U.S. denomination, as part of my ap-

Pontius' Puddle



pointed work on behalf of NBAC. A lack of a statement would not necessarily mean the Church was an aberration; as it turned out, ecclesiastical silence was the rule rather than the exception among U.S. religious denominations. Still, it can be important to be viewed as proactive rather than reactive. Particularly when in the midst of a controversial public issue, it is difficult to control the interpretation of silence. Silence can be interpreted as indifference or as tacit consent or endorsement of the research. Finally, I also invoked a political argument, that the Church had an opportunity to exemplify its teachings about responsible citizenship by contributing to the public forum and discussion.

Those arguments, I thought, had some success in trying to address the question of whether a statement should be issued. My church interlocutor also invited me to outline the items such a statement should address. These elements included:

- The ecclesiastical rationale for the statement;
- An endorsement of the legitimacy of scientific inquiry in general;
- Theological issues raised by the prospect of human cloning, rooted biblically in the concept of the "image of God" and ecclesiastically in the "Proclamation on the Family";
- An evaluation of human cloning based on these theological values;

- Ecclesiastical recommendations to the Federal commission.

Not two sentences perhaps, but the five elements could reflect the theological complexity of the issue in a brief statement while avoiding the kind of blanket and reactionary condemnations of science that had been issued by other denominations.

I do not know what became of this exchange of ideas and faxes. After an initial five-day flurry in early March, I was not contacted again. However, as the deadline for my report to the Federal commission grew near, and I had not received any statement from the Church on cloning, I made the dutiful phone call to Salt Lake, and a statement was faxed. It read: "The First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have declared that: God has commanded that the sacred powers of procreation are to be employed only between man and woman, lawfully wedded as husband and wife. We declare the means by which mortal life is created to be divinely appointed." "4 This statement, of course, comes directly from the "Proclamation on the Family," and its most notable aspect is that it meets the two-sentence quota perfectly. As a statement aimed at addressing the issues confronted by the Federal commission, however, it was a failure. Whether it was an ecclesiastical failure, I will discuss later.

FAITHFULNESS TO GOD, FAILING WITH CAESAR?

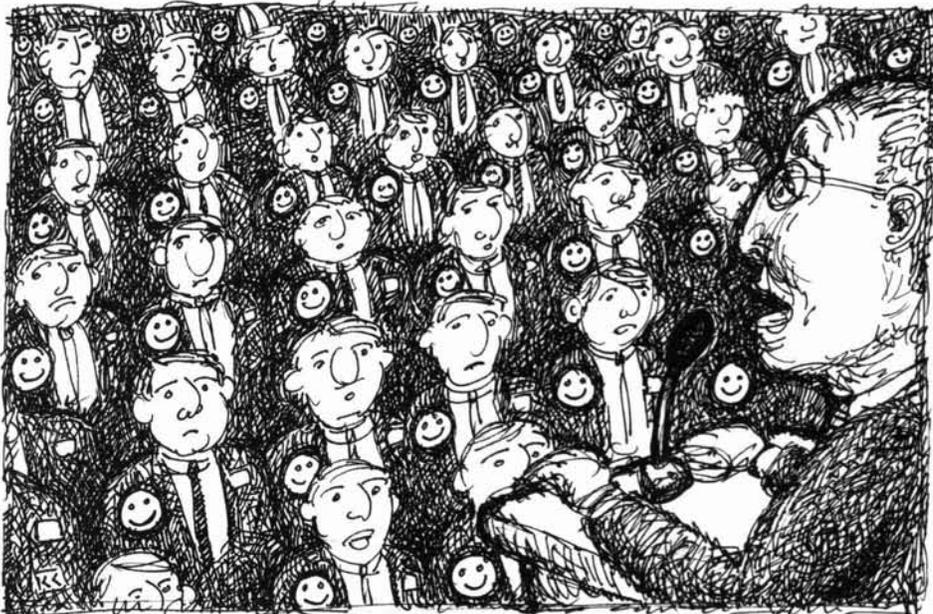
If we Mormons want a voice in the public discourse, how can we effectively and uniquely participate?

IN my report to NBAC, I had tried to bring some organization to diverse religious perspectives by using the metaphor of a traffic semaphore. A "green light" tradition indicated proceed with the research so long as it is safe; an "amber" tradition (where I tended to situate Jewish, Buddhist, and mainline Protestantism) represented proceed with much more caution; a "flashing red" (Hindu, Indian, and Islamic thought) tradition meant a stop or pause, i.e., a moratorium to assess the situation; and a "red light" tradition (African American, Orthodox, Roman Catholic) meant a full stop to research and a prohibition. Where within this schema might one situate the LDS tradition? It's really unclear the traffic semaphore applies at all because it presumes a complex system of rules and procedures to regulate vehicular traffic, while, to mix metaphors, LDS ethics is still in the stage of pulling hand-carts. There are both advantages and disadvantages to this stage.

One advantage is that the religious tradition does not find itself prematurely committed to a particular position that has insufficient scientific support. Simply by invoking the misleading slogan of "playing God" to criticize proposed scientific developments right at the outset, some traditions risk becoming caricatures of "religious reactionaries" to anything "new" in the fields of science or medicine. This is a good method for losing credibility within both the scientific community and among policy makers. In contrast, waiting for the scientific, ethical, and policy discussion to fully play itself out is a course of pragmatism and ecclesiastical prudence.

As Lester Bush has described, this kind of pattern has, more often than not, been followed by LDS leaders in encountering new scientific and medical advances. "Formal [LDS] public statements on medical-ethical issues generally do not appear until relatively late in the discussion," with subsequent guidance evolving in general conformity to medical and societal consensus.⁵ This approach also gives greater latitude to the expression of personal agency, and indeed, on most issues of medical ethics (abortion being the most prominent exception), even formal statements in the *General Handbook of Instructions* defer to personal decisions.

The significant disadvantage to "sitting on the sidelines" during a scientific, ethical, and



"Now, elders and sisters, when I said 'wear a smile when you are tracting,' I didn't mean it so literally."

policy debate is that LDS ethics can then only be reactive and responsive to a scientific *fait accompli*. In short, it seems to make theological convictions dependent on the progress of science and medical technology, rather than having theological convictions derive from independent theological principles or develop in dialogue along with scientific progress. The result: scientific and technological imperatives—"if it can be done, it should be done"—take primacy over ethical and theological imperatives.

Moreover, as noted before, if theological voices do not emerge until after the major scientific, moral, and policy questions have been settled, it becomes very hard to control the interpretation of ecclesiastical silence during the interim period when the Church is on the sidelines. One prominent example is displayed in a very compelling book, *Spare Parts*, by the sociologists Renee Fox and Judith Swazey, part of which is devoted to a study of the first artificial heart experiment at the University of Utah in 1982.⁶ Among other things, a reader of Fox and Swazey's account would come away understanding the LDS church as a community that believes as much in science as it does in God. Its doctrines indiscriminately celebrate technological achievements as revelations of the will of God, with

little concern about the implications of the science for broader social and ethical questions.

Obviously, there is an intermediate position between hasty and knee-jerk theological reactionarism and ecclesiastical sideline-sitting—one where the tradition is actively involved in the public discussion. My report to NBAC argued that, ideally, religious faiths are "communities of moral discourse"; that is, they provide valuable forums for continuing civic education for citizens, whether religious believers or not. Given the absence of general science literacy among the public, let alone comprehension of cloning, and the reticence of professional scientists to communicate their findings to the public, religious communities could initiate community discussion forums to begin this necessary dialogue. Two of the five recommendations the Federal commission made to President Clinton dealt with measures to provide a more informed citizenry with respect to the scientific, ethical, and cultural questions.⁷ Churches are a good place for that to happen. Could LDS wards become communities of moral discourse, or even simply be locations that host moral discussions on public issues? Places that provide scientific and ethical education on pressing issues, that offer occasions for members to become more the-

ologically informed? Cloning is only one of many difficult ethical issues America will confront in the coming decades, and I believe Mormonism can be a constructive voice in the national discussion. But, at present, on most issues we are a silent observer. Our entering the public discourse on ethical issues would reflect a serious undertaking of good citizenship in a democratic society. But I do not have much optimism for this occurring within our LDS faith community as currently constituted. Do we even want to have a voice in the public discussion? Can prophecy be compatible with citizenry? ☐

NOTES

1. Case originally prepared by Ronald Green, Dartmouth University. Used with permission.
2. "Leader of Mormon Church Looks to Future," *SUNSTONE* 20:2 (July 1997), 72.
3. Lester E. Bush Jr., *Health and Medicine among the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Crossroad, 1993), esp. ch. 6.
4. Communication with Don Lefevre, 21 Mar. 1997.
5. Bush, 202.
6. Renee C. Fox, Judith P. Swazey, *Spare Parts: Organ Replacement in American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), esp. ch. 6.
7. National Bioethics Advisory Commission, *Cloning Human Beings* (Rockville, MD: June 1997, iv-v), 110.



LANGUAGE OF LIGHT

- I. Above the bed
in my darkened room
car lights travel around the walls
like lighthouse beacons.
I lie silent, a child
counting under my breath
the small lighted ships
northing into the valley,
returning home.
- II. In the same room
when I pull the string,
the bulb disappears in the dark;
from the floor's far corner
the ventilator sends up
elongated shafts,
my parents' voices, grids of experience,
review the day,
light coming from below.

- III. In darkness of early morning
I wait,
knock on the bathroom door
for an opening,
knowing my daughter is radiant,
standing mirrored at the sink
on her wedding day—
the light shining under the door
a glyph of meaning.
- IV. My daughter and her child
squint at the camera lens,
their smiles surrendering
to sunlight.
Through a tiny aperture, the testament:
In my daughter's eyes,
the eyes of my grandchild,
light,
telling.

—ANITA TANNER