

NCPD CONCERNED WITH PRESIDENT BUSH'S DECISION ON EMBRYONIC STEM CELL RESEARCH

Washington, DC, August 10, 2001: The executive director of the National Catholic Office for Persons with Disabilities, Mary Jane Owen, a visually impaired, spinal injured wheelchair user with limited hearing, shared her distress today about the decision announced last night by President Bush:

“Our President attempted to reach a political compromise which seems destined to alter the way we, as a nation, are being encouraged to view life and our relationship with the One whom many of us know as our Maker.

The President, after listening and attending to those who aspire to normalize their view that our tiniest brothers and sisters are nothing more than products to be utilized by those with greater knowledge and power, may have hoped he could quiet the debate by approving just a little disrespect of these human beings on whom a "life-and-death" decision has already been made." But just like Pandora, who according to Greek mythology, opened that Box centuries ago, President Bush's attempt to create just a small crack in the door to the utilization of human embryos will surely find that the pressures for such exploitation will be greater than he and his colleagues can possibly control. His "limited" stamp of approval encourages the future eroding of respect for the unique and highly individualized variations in our God-given potential.

The debate about treating human embryos as products to be harvested for the benefit of another person's hope to postpone disabilities has been an extremely critical issue for those of us who affirm there is dignity and merit in the lives of every human being, whether they are dealing with the limitations that are a part of the aging process; young people who are living with various physical, mental or sensory disabilities or are one of the tiniest and most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters.

Our scientific community has given us many wonderful gifts but the drive to fully understand all the mysteries of life, to break down all the moral doors that previously blocked their explorations into every aspect of that subject can lead to frightening results. Too many bio-ethicists seek to discount a God they consider irrelevant. The neo-eugenics aspirations of many researchers and bio-ethicists have remained relatively free of scrutiny.

Eugenics advocates of a few short decades ago were forced to retreat from their efforts to create a better race of people due to the repugnance of the public upon learning of Nazi excesses. Princeton's ethics professor, Peter Singer, who asserts the life of a baby pig is more worthy than that of a baby with a disability is only the tip of a moral iceberg. How many Americans are aware Nobel Laureate James D. Watson,

a principal in uncovering the mysteries of DNA, previously suggested babies not be considered members of their families for three days until tests confirmed the child should be allowed to live? Or that his fellow researcher in the discovery of DNA, Francis Crick, suggested in a 1978 Pacifica interview that “no newborn should be declared human until it has passed certain tests regarding its genetic endowment and if it fails these tests it forfeits the right to life.”

When such respected authorities stress the need to be released from all moral restraints to their research, how long will it take until our scientists convince the majority of Americans that cloning is the next logical and appropriate step in their search to alter the human condition? Will we become convinced it is commonsense to grow our personal “twin” until we harvest their stem cells or their organs?

It is unfortunate that more parents and siblings of youngsters with various disabilities have not been asked by the media about the joys and triumphs which can be found on the other side of the challenges of the natural fragilities of our bodies. We continue to be inspired by the gumption and drive to participate in society that motivates those with assorted physical and sensory disabilities, while at the same time it seems many Americans would welcome the possibility of creating a new race, free of such encumbrances.

While Bush recognizes that those embryos currently unutilized retain the potential to grow into the individualized adults that they were designed to become, he decided it is possible to monitor and control the immorality already released into the world. But as the mythical Pandora realized to her dismay centuries ago, when we seek to understand all things, to become as wise as the gods, or God, we become engulfed within a cloud of misery and evil. However, in that Greek myth, Hope remained, as it must in our efforts to preserve the dignity of all human life.

SUMMARY:

The worst thing in life is not disability, or pain, or even death. The worst thing I can imagine is to create a society which sees itself as justified in treating people as objects to be used or discarded, as best fits the desires of the moment. And the moral choice announced last night will surely shape our future and that of all future generations. Let us Hope and Pray that the frenzied attempts to deny our shared vulnerability will not cause us to lose our moral guidance.

NCPD does not oppose stem cell research, or any other research that recognizes the inherent dignity of every human being. However, based on our convictions about the value of human life and its origins at conception, we have opposed the harvesting and

use of embryonic or fetal stem cells for research, as well as for human cloning. We find totally abhorrent the view that extremely immature human life can be used as a product for research or to enhance the quality of life of another person. No one, no matter how admired or wealthy, powerful or influential, should be allowed to destroy another's future potential. This is not a question of the political Right and Left but a question of Right and Wrong.