

Bishop Sgreccia: "Monstrous" to Allow Hybrid Embryos Calls for Mobilization of Scientific Community

LONDON, SEPT. 6, 2007 (Zenit.org).- The decision of British regulators to consider allowing the creation of hybrid embryos for use in medical experiments is "a monstrous act against human dignity," said the president of the Pontifical Academy for Life.

Bishop Elio Sgreccia said this today in response to the Wednesday ruling of Britain's Human Fertilization and Embryo Authority that it would in principle allow the creation of human-animal embryos.

"The British government has given in to the requests of a group of scientists absolutely against morality," Bishop Sgreccia told the Italian daily *Il Corriere della Sera*. "It is necessary that the scientific community mobilizes itself as soon as possible."

In a statement, the British agency announced that it will now consider two specific research proposals to create such embryos -- which scientists call chimeras, after the mythical Greek creature with a lion's head, a goat's body and a serpent's tail. The agency expects a decision for both cases in November.

The agency added, "This is not a total green light for ... hybrid research, but recognition that this area of research can, with caution and careful scrutiny, be permitted."

Bishop Sgreccia said that Britain's decision marks a turning point: "That frontier, of the crossroads of distinct species, has been overstepped today with the go-ahead of the British government. Up until today this had been banned in the field of biotechnology, and not only by religious associations."

The 79-year-old prelate added that with this ruling "human dignity is compromised, offended."

He said that the British embryo authority stipulated in its decision that the hybrid embryo must be destroyed within 14 days "because there is the awareness that the result they will find is a monstrosity."

"The policy that was approved is repugnant from an emotional point of view, but it is also irrational," Bishop Sgreccia added. He explained that Machiavellian ethics are being used to justify pursuing a noble cause -- the cure of diseases -- "with evil means, applied to scientific research."

He added, "We find ourselves facing an overthrow of ethics. Or better still: With this go-ahead, we put ourselves completely outside of the scope of ethics and humanity."

Stem cell search

Archbishop Peter Smith of Cardiff, Wales, chairman of the Department for Christian Responsibility and Citizenship, said in a statement Wednesday that the decision made by British lawmakers is "of profound significance."

"Human beings," he said, "have a unique nature specifically distinct from the natures of all other animals, and the profound ethical question is: Is it right to transgress that species boundary and attempt to mix human and animal natures in however limited a fashion?"

Scientists want to create hybrid embryos -- which will be made by injecting human DNA into cow or rabbit eggs -- in a bid to extract stem cells. Supporters say it solves the problem of finding enough, good quality human eggs.

Archbishop Smith raised the question as to why "ethically problematic research into hybrid embryos" is needed when adult and cord blood stem cell research has been proven successful.

"The Catholic Church is not against all stem cell research," he said, "and strongly supports such research using adult and cord blood stem cells. This has already led to major clinical benefits, whereas it appears that embryonic stem cell research has yet to produce any."