

# WORLD & NATION

## Jesuit priest asks Senate for total ban on cloning

By Agostino Bono  
Catholic News Service

WASHINGTON — Panelists at a Feb. 5 Senate hearing on human cloning agreed that the federal government should outlaw cloning for reproduction, but split on cloning human embryos for research.

Supporting a total ban was Jesuit Father Kevin FitzGerald, chairman of Catholic health care ethics at Georgetown University's Center for Clinical Bioethics.

Government regulation of scientific experimentation on humans is nothing new, given "the wrongs done in the name of science," and is needed to safeguard respect for human life, he said.

Other panelists argued that stem-cell experimentation using cloned human embryos held promise for major breakthroughs in curing diseases.

Called by the Judiciary Committee, the hearing was held as the Senate prepared to debate human cloning. Awaiting Senate action is a bill passed by the House of Representatives last year that would outlaw all human cloning. All bills proposed by senators would ban reproductive cloning, but several would allow cloning human embryos for research. President Bush has said he favors a total ban.

Father FitzGerald said public policy should not be subordinate to scientific criteria. "When facing the unknown or the uncertain, the answer of science is always to do the research. This is perfectly good science, but it may not be good public policy or the ethical thing to do," he said.

"We Americans know from our own history with eugenics and with research on minorities, the mentally disabled and even our own military forces, the tragedies that can occur when public policies concerning human experimentation are shaped according to the dictates of science. ... Our society has chosen to limit what experiments can be performed on human beings, even though these limits may slow scientific progress," he said.

Banning the cloning of human embryos would not curtail research into medical cures, "considering all the basic research

that still can be done using animal models, human tissue culture and adult stem cells," he said.

In response to a question by Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, Father FitzGerald noted that advances in biotechnology are causing a rethinking of the traditional terminology and concepts used by ethicists.

"Many concepts pre-date the biological information coming to us" and new ways of saying things have to be found to bridge the gap, he said.

Asked by Catholic News Service to elaborate, he said that traditional concepts of what it means to be human or to be a human embryo are being challenged. With cloning, the traditional formula of "human life begins at conception" has to be changed, he said. "We have to respect human life from the moment it begins."

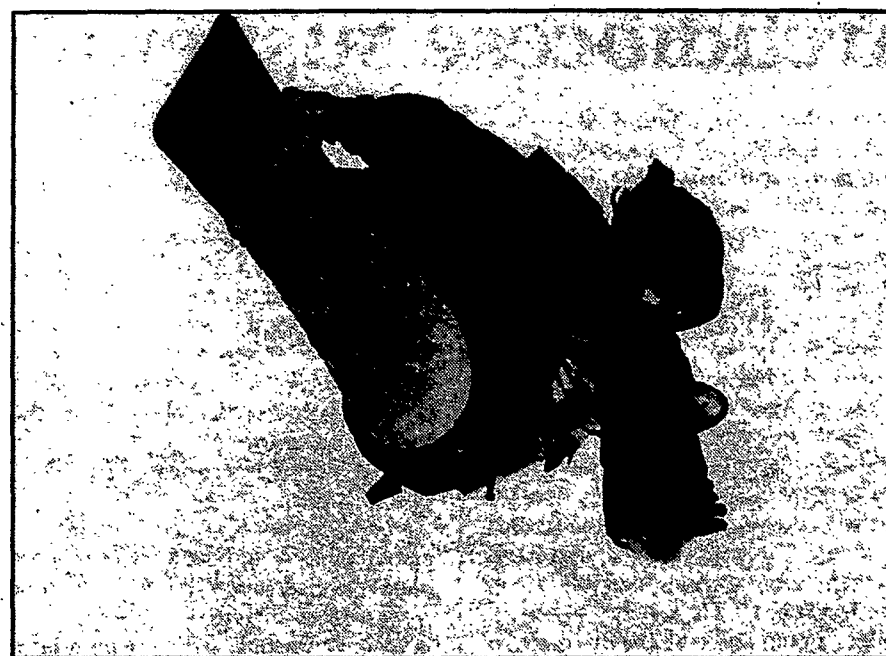
In cloning, life begins when the nucleus from an adult cell is transferred into an egg and then the egg is shocked to stimulate divisions, he said.

"We have the traditional concept that a human being looks like you and me," he said. "What happens if you create a human with a green glow, when you merge human cells with chimpanzee cells?" he asked.

The ability to do these things "is not evil," Father FitzGerald said. "What we do with these abilities could be evil. We have to integrate this new scientific information into our concepts. This integration causes a re-articulation and hopefully a better judging and understanding of how we want to go forward and which direction is forward," he said.

Supporting cloning of human embryos for research was Irving Weissman, developmental biology professor at Stanford University. Banning such cloning "would certainly close avenues of promising scientific and medical research," he said.

"Stem cells derived from a body cell or a disease cell of a patient who had inherited the risk for that disease could be powerful tools for medical research and lead to improved therapies," said Weissman, who chaired a National Academy of Sciences panel that advocated research cloning of human embryos as national policy.



Reuters/CNS

## Gliding to the gold

Kelly Clark of the United States wins the gold medal in the women's half-pipe snowboard competition in Park City, Utah, Feb. 10. Her gold medal was the first for the United States in the 2002 Winter Olympics.

Also testifying was Rep. David Weldon, R-Fla., who co-sponsored the anti-cloning bill passed by the House. Weldon, a physician, said the House vote transcended divisions over abortion. "Many pro-choice people voted for the ban," he said.

Rep. James Greenwood, R-Pa., testified in favor of permitting research cloning. He said it was an exaggeration to cite dangers of experimentation as a reason for a total ban.

"I also reject the premise that we are unable to distinguish between the dangers of untrammelled scientific experiments on the one hand and new paradigms in biomedical research on the other," he said.

Bishop Michael A. Saltarelli, whose diocese includes all of Delaware and parts of Maryland, urged Delaware and Maryland's four senators to vote for a total ban.

"The creation of human clones for scientific experimentation is an abomination and morally unacceptable — as is, of course, any desecration of the sanctity of all human life from conception to natural death," the bishop wrote in letters sent to the four senators at the end of January.

Several Catholic senators are co-sponsoring different human cloning bills. Sen. Mary Landrieu, D-La., is co-sponsoring a bill with Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., that would ban all human cloning. She is the

first Democratic senator to sponsor a bill with a total ban. Born and raised a Catholic, Landrieu often identifies herself simply as a Christian. Pro-lifers in her home state are applauding her efforts on the cloning issue.

"What we've asked people to do is pick up the phone and call her local or Washington office and thank her," said Peg Kenny, executive director of the Louisiana Pro-Life Council, the New Orleans archdiocesan pro-life organization. "We've got to pass a true, total ban on human cloning for research purposes. This is a human being, and it becomes incumbent upon everyone to make sure that this happens."

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, a Catholic, is co-sponsoring a bill with Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., that would allow human cloning for research embryos.

Another bill that would allow human cloning for research embryos has Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., as its main sponsor. It is co-sponsored by Catholic Senators Edward Kennedy, D-Mass.; Barbara Mikulski, D-Md.; and Richard Durbin, D-Ill.

The Feinstein bill is more detailed on the requirements for allowing research cloning.

Contributing to this story were Jane Harman in Wilmington and Peter Finney in New Orleans.

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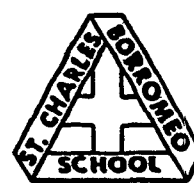
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## Gay priest is suspended

HUELVA, Spain (CNS) — In a Feb. 6 statement, Bishop Ignacio Noguera Carmona of Huelva, Spain, has suspended a priest who publicly declared himself to be a practicing homosexual. The bishop said he took action because of the priest's abrupt abandonment of parish service and open repudiation of his celibacy.

Father Jose Mantero "has placed himself outside the discipline of the church, in a matter of extreme gravity and scandal for the faithful," the bishop said.

Father Mantero, 39, told the national gay magazine *Zero* in early February that he had renounced celibacy and hoped his interview would act as a seed "so that one day homophobic declarations disappear from the church." According to news reports, the priest did not reappear in his parish after the interview was published.

Bishop Noguera said he had tried unsuccessfully to contact Father Mantero before suspending him, but "the facts are so manifest and attested — by his confession — that they themselves call for the responsible, prudent and charitable application" of church sanctions.

The Associated Press reported Feb. 8 that Father Mantero told a press conference that being gay was "a gift from God."