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COMMENTARY

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The Cloning

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The announcement by the Raelian sect's Clonaid company that they have delivered the first live-born human clone may be true. It may not. It seems unlikely. The best efforts of Michael West's Massachusetts-based Advanced Cell Technology, announced in a blaze of glory over Thanksgiving 2001, amounted to an admission that they could not even clone an embryo and keep it going for more than a few cell-divisions. The Chinese claim to be cloning embryos and harvesting stem-cells from them, though they have yet to prove it. Rudolph Jaenisch, our leading embryologist at MIT, has said repeatedly that it would be nearly impossible to clone a healthy child – it might take 1,000 failures to get one. But we need to remember that most scientists believed cloning Dolly the sheep was an impossibility, and had finally to admit that it had happened.

If this cloned baby is for real, it means many things. Biotech is globalized and accessible to small and crazy organizations. Any lingering doubts as to human baby-cloning as a component in the Brave New World to come are removed. The urgency of comprehensive federal legislation is underlined. And the need for international action to combat biotech abuses around the world moves higher on the agenda.

The announcement could, of course, hardly have been better timed as we prepare for the 108th Congress and its fresh legislative opportunities. It's now eighteen months since the House of Representatives passed Dr. David Weldon's comprehensive ban on human cloning by a large and bipartisan majority. In the Senate the cause was taken up by Senator Sam Brownback (R-KS) and Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA), and S. 1899 came close to success – though, as in the House, it faced other bills that were designed to protect the biotech industry's experimental and business opportunities, by criminalizing the implantation of cloned embryos and permitting embryo farms in which millions – indeed, hundreds of millions – of embryos would be manufactured and destroyed so that their stem-cells could be harvested. While all these bills are called "anti-cloning" bills, we need never to forget that all except one is a spoiler intended to give Big Biotech freedom to do as it pleases.

The debate so far has largely been a clash between two forces: deeply-held public intuitions that oppose cloning on any terms (and have, most recently, led Stanford University to lie about its cloning plans since they dare not use the C-word); and "all scientists agree that we have to do this to cure sick people" – a case fronted by Christopher Reeve and other celebrities.

Three fresh perspectives need to play major roles in the next round.

First, this really is *not* another pro-life v. pro-choice debate. Press comment has made only passing reference to the fact that leading pro-choice figures, and liberal environmentalists (as well as the pro-choice United Methodist Church) have all been

seeking a comprehensive ban, or at least a lengthy moratorium (as recommended by the President's Council on Bioethics), on *all* cloning. This emerging alliance across the political-cultural spectrum needs to be sustained and promoted.

Second, the financial interests of "scientists" involved need to be laid bare. No-one should be allowed to testify or pontificate on network television without financial disclosure. The public has a right to know when "scientists" are actually multi-millionaire business entrepreneurs (or hope soon to be).

Third, the international dimension must be put into the spotlight. Only a handful of nations – Singapore, China, and the United Kingdom especially – are actually pushing for experimental cloning. The European Union has banned funding for it. Germany, France, Norway, Australia – a variety of countries all round the world have banned it comprehensively or are planning to. The US has been pressing at the United Nations for a convention that would ban all cloning and isolate the pro-cloning nations.

It remains to be seen if "Eve," as the Raelians tell us their cloned baby is called, is really her mother's genetic twin and therefore her grandparents' genetic daughter, as they claim. We do know that the American Society of Reproductive Medicine (the *in vitro* doctors' group) is against baby-cloning only on grounds of safety. Let's work to use the Raelian announcement to generate fresh impetus for a comprehensive ban, and assert afresh the dignity of human nature. **CBHD**

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**A biography of Dr. Cameron can be found at
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