

Inperson

The Little Flower Blossoms in Yale Neuroscientist

Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk (pa-HOLE-check) is a parish priest who happens to hold a doctorate in neuroscience from Yale, and travels widely speaking on bioethics.

Before he worked at St. Patrick's in Falmouth, Mass., he worked as a molecular biologist at Massachusetts General Hospital.

He holds four undergraduate degrees (molecular and cellular biology, chemistry, biochemistry and philosophy) from the University of Arizona and serves on the ethics committee at St. Anne's Hospital in Fall River, Mass. He recently spoke with Register features correspondent Tim Drake.

Where are you from originally?

I grew up in Tucson, Ariz., and am the oldest of five children. I have four sisters. Two of my sisters are adopted. My father was an astro-

physicist at the University of Arizona and my mother was a nurse.

Is there an early experience that led you to pursue science?

I grew up in a family where there was a lot of discussion about science. Jesuit scientists from the Vatican observatory at the University of Arizona would come by the house and were friends of the family. I enjoyed interacting with them a great deal growing up. They are doing interesting work as astronomers and priests, and are trying to build bridges between science and faith by keeping the dialogue going.

At age 15, I won a fellowship that was spon-



Father Tadeusz Pacholczyk testifies on human cloning during a hearing of a Massachusetts Senate committee last year. (CNS photo by Cory Silken, The Pilot)

sored by the American Heart Association. As a result, I was assigned to a summer rotation with Dr. Jack Copeland, a cardiac surgeon at the University of Arizona Medical Center. I spent the summer in the operating room watching surgeries and going on rounds. I was able to shadow a surgeon in most aspects of his daily existence, visit patients, see the inner workings of a large hospital, even go to the morgue for autopsies. It was a wonderful summer that drew me in the direction of the biosciences.

What led to your vocation?

My vocation was connected to a lot of things, but it was primarily related to an exposure to St. Thérèse of Lisieux and her life. During a trip to Italy when I was 17, I read her autobiography and was struck by her persistence in going after her own vocation as a

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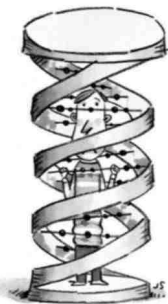
Carmelite nun. That was really helpful to me. Here was a 15-year-old girl who was willing to go to the mother superior, to her bishop and all the way to the Pope to plead her case. She knew what she was about. I knew at that point that I needed to pursue my own calling with a real persistence.

You have spoken frequently on cloning and have even testified on cloning before the legislature. In a nutshell, what's wrong with cloning?

The first thing that is most distinctly wrong about it, and the Church has stated this quite clearly, is that cloning participates in the basic evil of moving procreation out of the setting of committed marital intimacy and into the laboratory. Human procreation is not meant to happen in that setting because that opens it up to all kinds of ways that you can violate human dignity.

There is a dignity both to the process of procreation as established by God through sexual self-giving and the dignity of the life itself, which is engendered by that process. Cloning threatens human dignity on both of those levels.

Cloning also represents a sort of genetic engineering. Instead of choosing just a few features you'd like your offspring to have — for example, greater height or greater intelligence — cloning allows you to choose all of the features, so it represents an extremely serious



form of domination and manipulation by parents over their own children. It represents a type of parental power that parents are not intended to have. Ultimately, cloning is a type of human breeding, a despotic attempt by some individuals to dominate and pre-determine the make-up of others.

With cloning you also distort the relationships between generations. If a woman were to clone herself using her own egg, you wouldn't need to have a man involved at all. Oddly, she would end up giving birth to her own identical twin — a twin sister who is also her daughter.

There has been much discussion of reproductive cloning vs. therapeutic cloning. Both types are seen as immoral by the Church, are they not?

There really is no difference. You go through the same identical steps to make the cloned embryo. Once you have the cloned embryo, it is from there you make the decision

about what you will do. You have two options: One is to implant it into the uterus and cause a live birth, and the other is to destroy that embryo and harvest its stem cells. If you want to be really precise about the moral evil here, there is a greater evil in therapeutic cloning, where you create life for the purpose of destroying it. With a cloned birth, at least you would end up with a baby that is alive.

All of us have our origins in the embryo, and embryos should not be instrumentalized for research purposes, even if the ends that might be obtained through that research are indisputably very good ends. It would not be acceptable ever to do this kind of research that depends on embryonic destruction. Sometimes I like to say to people, "As a former embryo myself, I feel qualified to speak to these matters."

An embryo is a human being, a being that is human, that is not some other kind of animal. Whether it's a person yet at the moment of conception, whether it's been ensouled — those are very interesting intellectual discussions but they're not ultimately relevant. In the moral analysis, what's critical is that once you're a being who is human, a being with the potential to become an adult, then you are a bearer of human rights.

Based on your knowledge, has anyone been successful in cloning a human being?

No. Advanced Cell Technology

in Worcester, Mass., has been trying to do so for therapeutic purposes, but its early embryos have only grown to the six-cell stage. You have to get past the eight-cell stage before you can talk about the embryo growing under its own impetus. Thus far, no human embryos have gotten beyond this stage.

In fact, recent research in the journal *Science* suggests that given current techniques, cloning humans may not be possible at all. Researchers have been trying to clone primates for years. One researcher in a laboratory that specializes in primate research has tried more than 300 times to clone monkeys. The best she could get was a placenta with no fetus. Primates are extremely resistant to cloning. That's why most scientists give zero credence to the claims of the Raelians that they have already cloned four or five humans.

What's at the heart of scientists' inability to clone primates and humans?

In primate cloning procedures, it looks as if the mitotic spindle, which is critical to the normal process of cell division, gets damaged in a way that the cell cannot recover from. The chromosomes do not move properly into the daughter cells and you get abnormalities that look like they will be very hard to surmount using current techniques.

How did we get here?

All of this stems from our society

accepting in-vitro fertilization in the 1970s and 1980s. In-vitro fertilization is the quintessential slippery slope. Commercial interests came in and started offering it as standard practice. Today, our society has basically accepted in-vitro.

The Catholic Church is one of the few voices out there that has been consistently opposed to it, and now we stand on the brink of confronting previously unimaginable issues about embryonic stem cells, cloning and genetic engineering. It is not recognized enough that in-vitro is what led us to where we are today.

What is your primary concern regarding the direction we seem to be headed?

My worry about these things always comes from the perspective of a consumerist society. There is a real danger of a consumerist eugenics in the future. Every parent desires a perfect baby. This is a natural aspiration. But in a biotech-laden society under the shadow of consumerism this aspiration can easily become disordered.

As parents are offered new possibilities for choosing their children's characteristics, they are unlikely to be able to resist the temptation. By focusing on their desires, they become oblivious to the various evils, which are part and parcel of the fulfillment of those desires.

As huge industries emerge to assure the satisfaction of those desires, the profit motive will pre-

clude any serious examination of the inherent moral objectionability of what is transpiring. This is precisely what has occurred with in-vitro fertilization. I see that as the looming threat on the horizon.

As a civilization we have by and large adopted an erroneous initial assumption, namely, that when I get married I have the right to a baby. That is out there, and people have bought it hook, line and sinker. We don't have a right to a baby. A baby is not a possession. When we get married, we have a right instead to those acts which are, in and of themselves, disposed to the procreation of new life.

Life itself is a gift. If God gives you that gift, great! If he does not, that doesn't somehow throw open the doors for you to do whatever you want in order to lay hold on a life.

I repeat this point often: Human life is a gift, not a right, not a possession. It is a blessing to be realized and embraced only via the specific and sacrosanct means God has fore-ordained, namely, the marital acts of husband and wife. That way human procreation is not dehumanized and depersonalized, and the human life that is brought into being with God's help is not turned into an object of manipulation but is treated as a unique and irrepeatable subject to be safeguarded, esteemed and loved at all points from conception to natural death.

Tim Drake writes from St. Cloud, Minnesota.