

**NEIL G. MESSER****Cloning, Creation and Control**


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*Response to D. Gareth Jones: 'Human Cloning: Unwarranted Control or Legitimate Stewardship?'* Science & Christian Belief, (2002) 14, 159-180

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Professor Jones begins his paper by citing a number of examples of the 'almost universal opprobrium' (p. 159) elicited by the prospect of human reproductive cloning. As he implies, when there is such a widespread consensus against it, it is easy for rigorous argument to be displaced by strident rhetoric. The 'sceptical stance' (p. 179) which he adopts in assessing the arguments advanced against human cloning is therefore potentially valuable in testing the soundness of opposition (including Christian opposition) thereto. He also offers a valuable reminder about ethical priorities (p. 180), though it has to be said that it is perfectly possible to be morally concerned *both* about the effects of poverty on health *and* about the implications of technological interventions such as cloning.

On beginning to read Professor Jones' paper, I was initially unclear as to the motivation for his scepticism. The conclusions he draws about human cloning (pp. 179-180) seem fairly close to those of the authors he criticises, and he even seems to reach these conclusions on somewhat similar grounds (of which more later). So what is he seeking to do?

**The Mistrust of Scientists**

Jones clarifies his intention at the beginning of the conclusion, where he states that he has adopted a sceptical stance towards objections to cloning 'not because I wish to promulgate cloning as a desirable reproductive alternative, *but because accepting seriously insubstantial reasons against it may have detrimental effects on the standing of science in the eyes of the public (including the Christian community) and policy makers*' (p. 179, my italics). Earlier, he has argued in effect that the cloning debate has become an opportunity for the demonisation of science and scientists by those hostile to the whole scientific enterprise (pp. 164-166). There is some justice in this complaint, as I know from my own and others' experience in biomedical research, and it is perhaps understandable if members of the scientific community sometimes display impatience with what Jones describes as 'the intense and highly emotive publicity' (p. 160) surrounding scientific developments such as somatic cell nuclear transfer.

However, I am sure Professor Jones and I are agreed that while the mistrust and demonisation of scientists are entirely out of place, keen public scrutiny and an expectation that scientists be publicly accountable are not. Like it or not, work in these areas does have far-reaching practical consequences and

equally far-reaching moral implications. If the decisions that societies make about these things are not to go by default or to be based on unexamined and questionable moral assumptions,<sup>1</sup> it is essential that both the technologies themselves and the moral values implicit in their use be subjected to the fullest possible public scrutiny and discussion.<sup>2</sup>

### The Importance of Inarticulate Reactions

The problem with opening scientific developments up to public scrutiny, discussion and accountability is that very often, public responses are not couched in the terms of scientific rationality. This can mean that members of the public express fears or ethical concerns that seem implausible to scientists and policy-makers: it is tempting, but unwise, for the latter groups to write these concerns off as irrational and irrelevant.<sup>3</sup> There is a related temptation both for theologians and for scientists who are Christians: much public discussion of these questions quickly resorts to theological language and metaphors such as ‘playing God’, even though, as Professor Jones observes, ‘the significance of references to God is unclear’ (p. 165). It is tempting both for theological and scientific professionals to dismiss such use of God-language as unreflective and superstitious.

Jones makes some attempt to resist these temptations. For example, in discussing Leon Kass’s argument about ‘the wisdom of repugnance’, he acknowledges that ‘repugnance cannot readily be dismissed ...’ (p. 168). However, he goes on to state the truism that ‘[by] itself, repugnance does not constitute a moral argument against something’ (p. 169), and writes off Kass’s opposition to cloning as ‘part of a much broader anti-technology stance’.<sup>4</sup>

But this somewhat misses the point about widespread, inarticulate or semi-

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1 For a discussion of the questionable moral assumptions underpinning much public policy making in this area, see Banner, M., ‘On not begging the questions about biotechnology’, In *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Moral Problems*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1999), pp. 204-224.

2 I think it is also true to say that scientists who are Christians have a particular accountability to the Christian community – as, of course, does any Christian, whatever his or her calling. For scientists, this accountability could mean many things, including: helping the community understand emerging technologies and their implications, so that it can develop informed theological and ethical responses; giving an account of their Christian faith to their fellow scientists in appropriate ways; perhaps, on occasion, playing a part in ‘prophetic’ speech about new technologies in ways which might not always endear them to their fellow scientists. However, this is not the occasion for a full exploration of the Christian vocation of a scientist.

3 See further Wynne, B., ‘Interpreting public concerns about GMOs – questions of meaning’, In Deane-Drummond, C., and Szerszynski, B., with Grove-White, R. (eds.), *Re-Ordering Nature: Theology, Society and the New Genetics*, London and New York: T & T Clark (2003), pp. 221-248.

4 It may be true that Kass holds a [broad] anti-technology stance’, but Jones does not offer evidence to support this assertion. He does offer evidence from Kass’s writings of a long-standing opposition to any technological intervention in *human reproduction* (p. 163), but this is a far cry from a general opposition to technology as such.

articulate responses such as the so-called ‘Yuk factor’. In a striking essay, Celia Deane-Drummond and her colleagues argue that there is a Christian responsibility to ‘[focus] with empathic sensitivity – with what Simone Weil calls *attention* – on the integrity of what particular people are saying, singly and in groups, about their own reactions’ to emerging technologies and to the ways in which policy and regulatory decisions are made.<sup>5</sup> They discern, in a series of focus-group discussions about genetically modified foods, a more nuanced and sophisticated range of responses to the technology, its ethical and (implicitly) theological significance than policy makers and scientists are apt to give the public credit for. There is no reason to think that similar points could not be made about the human cloning debate. Perhaps it behoves us all to engage more seriously and respectfully with such concerns than we have sometimes done hitherto, even when they seem to us poorly or inarticulately expressed.

### On Thinking Clearly about Creation – and Redemption

Professor Jones characterises many of the theological worries about human cloning as centring on the issue of technological control over human reproduction. He rightly recognises (pp. 177 ff.) that such concerns are underpinned by a doctrine of creation. He claims that those – including me – who object to human cloning on the grounds that it represents excessive human control do so because we ‘[view] creation as a completed act’ of God (p. 177), a ‘given’ with which humans are not to tamper. This way of putting the matter tends both towards deism (it implies a God who set the cosmic machine running at the beginning, rather than one who is continuously involved in the upholding of creation) and towards a crude naturalism (it makes an over-simple equation between what *is* and what is *good* or *right*). The other authors cited by Jones must say for themselves whether this is an accurate representation of their views: it is a caricature of mine. As far as I can see, such a distorted version of the Christian doctrine of creation is in no way implied by what I have tried to say about the complex relationship between God’s creative activity and human responsibility.<sup>6</sup>

Professor Jones’ proposed alternative to ‘creation as a completed act’ is to ‘[view] creation as a transformative process, according to which God moved the world from a chaotic nothingness to an ordered light-filled, life-bearing place’ (p. 178). Now it is easy to see how such a view could be derived from a reading of Genesis 1, but how adequate is it as a Christian account of God’s creative activity?

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5 Deane-Drummond, C., Grove-White, R., and Szerszynski, B., ‘Genetically modified theology: the religious dimensions of public concerns about agricultural biotechnology’, In Deane-Drummond *et al.* (eds.), *Re-Ordering Nature*, pp. 17-38, at pp. 18-19, citing Weil, S., *Gravity and Grace*, London: Routledge (1952).

6 Messer, N. G., *The Ethics of Human Cloning*, Cambridge: Grove Books (2001), pp. 19-21.

In a brief but characteristically illuminating survey of the doctrine of creation,<sup>7</sup> Colin Gunton distinguishes between two senses of the phrase 'maker of heaven and earth'. It could refer to one who makes something out of pre-existing material, as a potter fashions an object from clay. In articulating a concept of an already existing world which God 'transformed' or 'moved' from chaos to order, Jones appears to be arguing for a version of this view. But, says Gunton, the distinctive contribution of Christian theologians was to show that this understanding of God as 'maker' was inadequate, and to insist on the alternative understanding, that God creates 'out of nothing'. It is this understanding of creation out of nothing, together with the affirmation that the God who thus creates the world is a Trinity of Father, Son and Spirit, that has allowed Christian theology to speak of the created order as 'very good' in its own right; to give an account of God as intimately involved with his creation, but in such a way that the creation remains free to be itself; to acknowledge the reality of evil, not as inherent in matter or the created order, but as something that subverts the creation from fulfilling God's purpose; to speak of the redemption of creation accomplished by the Father, through the Son, in the power of the Spirit; and to articulate the hope of the ultimate fulfilment of God's loving purposes for his creation.<sup>8</sup>

I would suggest that it is such a doctrine of creation that will allow us to give a satisfactory account of human responsibility in and for the world, as Professor Jones rightly attempts to do (pp. 178-179). The goodness of creation lies at the root of the notion that humans have a vocation to work in the world and make something of it as God's 'stewards'. The existence of evil means that there is work to be done to overcome suffering and injustice, while the fact of human sinfulness teaches us caution and humility in this work: even our well-intentioned efforts can easily be subverted by our own selfishness, our self-deception and partiality of vision and by the unjust structures within which we all live and work. The hope of redemption and fulfilment, however, teaches us that in God's good purposes, sin and evil are not the ultimate reality and will not have the final say.

It is the hope of redemption that can give some shape and direction to our human activity in this world. If God is at work in the world through Christ and the Spirit, to redeem it and to bring it to fulfilment, then from a Christian perspective, the key question to ask about any human activity is its relation to this redemptive activity of God. Is it in line with God's redemptive work, as it were serving and co-operating with God's purposes as they are made known in Christ? Is it in opposition to this redemptive work of God, serving rather the purposes of chaos and destruction? Or does it set itself up as a *substitute* for God's redemptive activity? It is between the first and third of these possibili-

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7 Gunton, C. E., 'The doctrine of creation', In Gunton, C. E. (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Doctrine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1997), pp. 141-157.

8 *ibid.*, pp. 141-144.

ties that the most careful discernment is required, for the characteristic temptation of well-intentioned people is perhaps not to use technologies for overtly selfish or destructive ends, but to imagine that any human predicament can be solved by human cleverness and skill.

This was the point of my use of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's distinction between the 'ultimate' and the 'penultimate', which was a central part of the argument of my earlier essay about human cloning (though ignored by Professor Jones: pp. 176-177).<sup>9</sup> By the 'ultimate' Bonhoeffer means God's redemptive activity: this is God's work, and no human activity can substitute for it. But the 'penultimate', the realm of this-worldly activity that 'prepares the way' for God's redemptive Word, *is* the proper form of human activity in the world. For example, feeding hungry people will not in itself redeem them, but can be seen as 'penultimate' activity that may prepare the way for God's Word: 'if the hungry man does not attain to faith', writes Bonhoeffer, 'then the guilt falls on those who refused him bread'.<sup>10</sup>

In the light of this distinction, there is clearly a legitimate and highly important role for health care as a 'penultimate' activity, and it is no accident that the health care professions have often been held in high regard as Christian vocations. We might say that many of the most subtle temptations for medicine, particularly in its high-tech forms, have to do with attempting to achieve ultimate ends by human means. So how is human cloning to be understood? If it can be seen as a 'penultimate' enterprise which works, as it were, with the grain of God's redemptive activity, then presumably Christians can regard it as legitimate in principle. However, I have argued that it is highly likely to fall into the other, 'ultimate', category – to become a would-be substitute for God's redemptive work. And part of my reason for thinking this has to do with *control*.

## Cloning as Control

At the heart of many theological objections to human cloning lies the claim that it represents excessive technological control over human identity and reproduction, that it thereby exceeds the bounds of legitimate human dominion over creation, represents an arrogant attempt to 'play God' and undermines the human dignity of cloned children (and ultimately, all of us) by turning children into commodities and technological products. Professor Jones repeatedly returns to this argument, in one or other of its forms, and expresses varying degrees of scepticism about the different versions he cites.

Jones is right that arguments about 'cloning as control' are often carelessly expressed, and need to be handled with some caution. That is why I have attempted elsewhere to differentiate between different possible versions of the

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<sup>9</sup> Messer, *The Ethics of Human Cloning*, pp. 19-21; Bonhoeffer, D., *Ethics* (Smith, N. H., ed. and trans.), London: Collins (1964), pp. 120-143.

<sup>10</sup> Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, p. 137.

claim that cloning represents excessive human control.<sup>11</sup> To claim, for example, that everyone who sought to have a cloned child would be consciously and deliberately seeking to control that child's identity would be palpably absurd. But it may be more plausible to argue that marriage and parenthood combine 'social, biological and normative bonds'<sup>12</sup> in a structure which would be seriously undermined by the practice of cloning, regardless of the intentions of the individual practitioners.<sup>13</sup> It is also highly plausible, as Jones seems to agree, that permitting cloning would contribute to a shift in societal attitudes such that society '[thought] increasingly of children as products, who [were] expected to conform to quality control standards' (p. 179) and it became acceptable to seek 'to make other people in one's own image' (ibid.). It matters little whether or not cloning *would* allow total control over the clone's identity – I agree with Jones (p. 171) that it would not, though I think he overstates his case and plays down too much the influence of biology in shaping the personal identity of embodied creatures. But the point, as I think he recognises in his conclusions, is not whether we would *succeed* in making children in our own image or exercising total quality control: rather, it is the implications for our moral and spiritual 'character' of our being prepared to *try*. Jones' own language of '[making] other people in our own image' is surely a signal that this would be an enterprise with 'ultimate', or God-like, pretensions. Although he denies that these arguments provide a 'categorical answer' (p. 180) about cloning, the logic of his own reservations seems to point towards the conclusion that it would indeed represent an unwarranted attempt to control the identities of others and thus would overstep the bounds of legitimate human responsibility for God's creation. If I am right about this, then he and I may ultimately be agreed about our assessment of human reproductive cloning.

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11 Messer, *The Ethics of Human Cloning*, pp. 12-15.

12 Waters, B., *Reproductive Technology: Towards a Theology of Reproductive Stewardship*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd (2001), p. 79.

13 Waters, B., 'One flesh? Cloning, procreation and the family', In Cole-Turner, R. (ed.), *Human Cloning: Religious Responses*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox (1997), pp. 78-90.

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## **CALUM MACKELLAR**

# **Creation – a Bond of Love?**

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In his comprehensive article, 'Human Cloning: Unwarranted Control or Legitimate Stewardship?', Professor Jones questions some of the theological and other arguments presented against human cloning and indicates that 'there

are enormous problems in bedding ... down [the repugnance of the cloning procedure] with convincing arguments'.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, after having examined each argument presented thus far against reproductive human cloning, he even suggests that the 'arguments against [reproductive cloning] are not as strong as many assume'.<sup>2</sup>

And at the end of his article, Professor Jones states that he has 'adopted a sceptical stance in assessing the arguments against human cloning ... because accepting seriously insubstantial reasons against it may have detrimental effects on the standing of science in the eyes of the public (including the Christian community) and policy makers'.<sup>3</sup>

Professor Jones is, therefore, concerned that as a result of the weakness of the current arguments, public confidence towards science may be eroded once new arguments in favour of reproductive cloning are put forward. And in this respect, Professor Jones' concerns may be relevant since it is because of a dearth of convincing arguments that the condemnation of reproductive cloning has already been undermined following the (unconfirmed) announcement by Brigitte Boisselier, representing the Raelian religious movement, of the birth of a cloned baby on the 26 December 2002. Indeed, just two days later it was possible to read an editorial in *The Independent on Sunday* in the UK stating that 'There is nothing frightening about the idea of identical twins, and nothing unnatural about sibling relationships of love and care; therefore there can be nothing objectionable about a clone and its relationship with its family.' The article continued by indicating that as soon as one sees that the cloning technique has the aim of helping women to have children 'any sustained objections melt away'.<sup>4</sup>

So are there any convincing arguments against cloning?

Before replying to this question, however, it should be noted that it may be difficult for those who do not have a religious faith of any kind to consider a human person as receiving any 'human dignity' beyond the reality of the scientific universe. And accordingly, they may find difficulty in accepting any arguments that transcend what they see as a somewhat positive medical 'solution' to a problem. But for those who do have a religious faith, and especially for Christians, there is, in the words of Professor Jones, 'a dignity that comes from God who created us and who sustains us'.<sup>5</sup> Thus, it may be useful first to consider the specific action of creating human persons in the image of God.

In this respect, Christians believe that the act of creation of Adam and humankind by the triune God was done in the presence of and through the love between the three persons of the Godhead (Father, Son and Holy Spirit). Thus

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1 Jones, Gareth 'Human Cloning: Unwarranted Control or legitimate Stewardship?', *Science & Christian Belief*, (2002) 14 (2), 172.

2 *ibid.* 168.

3 *ibid.* 179.

4 Grayling, A.C. 'We should not let baby Eve tempt us away from progress', *The Independent on Sunday*, 29 December 2002.

5 Jones, *op.cit.* 180.

the *creation* of personal otherness by God and the outpouring of his *love* can be considered as expressions of the same profound action.

But this 'creative-love' action can also be considered on a human level. Accordingly, it is suggested that with regard to the ethical creation of human children we should understand the matrix, or pattern, of creation in God as continuing and not distinct from the love between the three co-creators (mother, father and God). In other words, only when love exists should the creation of other persons be envisaged.

Thus, divine creation and human co-creation are similar. Human creation will then form, as is the case with divine creation, a unifying and wonderful communion and mutual belonging between the creating partners, whilst enabling another communion between creators and creatures.<sup>6</sup>

However, in the case of reproductive cloning, the presence of love between the co-creators does not exist. Indeed, it is because procreative cloning dissociates creation from the communion between the biological parents and God and reduces it to a form of creation from a single person, that real communal love cannot be expressed. The act of creation then becomes divorced from the existence of love between creators. Thus, any single person creativity, such as adult reproductive cloning, in which a communion through mutual love with existing othernesses is not present, can only be understood as one of the strongest ever antitheses of love. Furthermore, the aforementioned communion between creators and creatures is also impossible since, as Denis Alexander has pointed out, the real biological creators of the clone would not be the nucleus-donor, but the parents of the donor<sup>7</sup> and it is doubtful, therefore, whether a communion of love between creators and creatures would be possible.

In this respect, Professor Jones also discusses which of the terms such as 'creating', 'donation', 'production', 'making' and 'begetting' should be used in the context of reproductive cloning.<sup>8</sup> A similar discussion was initiated when Axel Kahn<sup>9</sup> said that he preferred the words 'creator' and 'created', whilst others preferred the word 'donor' since it implied a gift, a free handing-over of individuality from the person being cloned.

The same problem in the use of words appears when the term 'donor insemination' is used instead of the possible 'creator insemination'. With regard to the former, what is being suggested is that a person is only giving their gametes without any consideration of mutual belonging in this gift/donation. Indeed, no reality of profound love or mutual belonging between the co-creators

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6 For a more developed discussion of this topic see MacKellar, C. *Creation, Co-Creation and the Ethics of Pro-Creative Cloning*, Edinburgh: The Scottish Order of Christian Unity (2001). Free copies are available from: European Bioethical Research, 191 Leith Walk, Edinburgh EH6 8NX, SCOTLAND, [www.bioethics@europe.com](mailto:www.bioethics@europe.com)). This document can also be found at: <http://www.socu.org/Creation%20and%20Cloning.pdf>

7 Alexander, Denis 'Cloning, Distorting the image of God', *Christianity Renewal*, November 2002.

8 Jones, *op.cit.* 166.

9 Kahn, Axel 'Cloning, dignity and ethical revisionism', *Nature* (1997) 388, 320.

or for the child created as a result of these gametes will be envisaged in the 'donor'. However, what is being overlooked is that the resulting child will probably not experience this 'gift' in the same way. Indeed, it has been noticed that many children created from donated gametes undertake extensive and costly investigations to find their 'real' genetic 'parents' (i.e. creators) when they grow up.<sup>10</sup> In some mysterious way, the children know that they have been created and not 'gifted'.

This is because the act of creation is far deeper and more profoundly binding than a 'gift' of life with which no mutual obligations are associated. It was because God created and did not merely 'give' life to his human children that he went to the cross for them instead of just re-creating other 'persons' in another and better universe. Indeed, God did not donate his universe, he created it.

In all these discussions, therefore, there is a need to consider what could be defined as creation ethics in which 'creation', 'love' and 'mutual belonging between the creators and the creature' should always be present together. And in this respect it is important to emphasise that any creation ethics is specific to the act of creation and not to the child created in this way. Indeed, Professor Jones is right when he states that '*Christians, in particular, should vigorously oppose even the merest hint that human clones be treated in sub-personal ways*'.<sup>11</sup> Thus, in the same way that no illegitimate child is ever born – since only illegitimate acts of creation exist and are not persons in themselves – future children born through procreative cloning should be loved by society as much as any other child.

God will, of course, continue to love and welcome this child which, in some mysterious way he took part in creating. Indeed, he has already bought back this child through the blood of his son, Jesus Christ, so that he can re-create him or her as his adopted child.

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10 Blyth, E., Crawshaw, M., Speirs, J. (eds.) *Truth and the Child 10 Years On: Information Exchange in Donor Assisted Conception*, British Association of Social Workers (1998).

11 Jones, *op.cit.* 173.

## **D. GARETH JONES**

### **Response by Gareth Jones**

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I would like to express my gratitude to both respondents who have taken up the challenge I laid down to provide substantial arguments against reproductive cloning. The resulting debate is a very healthy one and important points have emerged. It is not my intention to attempt to respond to all of them, but

to make a number of general comments.

It emerges that, regardless of the precise conclusion one arrives at over reproductive cloning, it is unhelpful to portray cloning as a black-and-white issue. Both respondents have provided salutary arguments from a Christian perspective, and these are far more nuanced than the knock-down versions of the debate in the popular press (Christian as well as secular).

Any serious discussion about cloning will highlight a number of crucial principles: the importance of human (and divine) relationships, the centrality of (profound) love, and the continuing mutual obligations we have for each other (especially the children we bring in to the world). Such obligations do not evaporate after a few months or even years. The children we have a hand in creating (regardless of the means) are to be cared for and nurtured in love until (and through) adulthood.

These comments have repercussions well beyond cloning and even beyond technological forms of reproduction. It would, therefore, be unwise to tackle cloning as an isolated moral dilemma. It is part of a network of such dilemmas and challenges, the existence of which demands consistency in our responses.

Technological forms of reproduction bring us face-to-face with the possibility of excessive control. But what criteria do we have for determining what constitutes excessive control? Neil Messer distinguishes between penultimate and ultimate activities (after Bonhoeffer). When the former is carried out as though it were the latter, it becomes a substitute for God's redemptive work. Cloning is seen in these terms since it represents excessive technological control over human identity and reproduction, thereby turning children into commodities and technological products. I have no wish to disagree with the essence of this, although the judgment even here turns on whether children would be turned into commodities and technological products. I am yet to be convinced that we have adequate criteria for discerning what constitutes excessive technology in many of the demanding ethical domains confronting theologians, ethicists and policy makers.

One fundamental query, which emerges repeatedly in biomedical discussions, is the extent to which Christians can speak to the secular/pluralist world of which they are a part. Many arguments within theological ethics are based explicitly on theological premises (which is hardly surprising). How are these to be translated into meaningful concepts of relevance to secularists and others? This is one of the foremost tasks confronting those of us who wish to speak to the societies of which we are a part. This is where bridges are needed between the different world views, bridges that will, at one and the same time, assist in understanding but not undermine essential Christian truths.

One of the major tragedies I encounter are the large number of people and groups who equate the message of the Christian Church with opposition to biotechnology. Christians in some areas are so vocal in opposition to practically all biomedical developments that this is not a surprising conclusion for others

to reach. Nevertheless, I am deeply saddened by it, and often find myself in a predicament. Its one redeeming feature is that it gives me an opportunity to explain why my stance is a different one. I believe the two respondents help in this regard, since informed debate is the one way to dispel misunderstanding and misinformation.

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