

Poll: Britain opposes animal-human embryos

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Cardinal Keith O'Brien of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, president of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, said he was "delighted" that a majority of people were against the Human Embryology and Fertilization Bill.

LONDON (CNS) - A Scottish cardinal welcomed the results of an opinion poll that suggests the British public opposes the creation of animal-human hybrid embryos for experimentation.

Cardinal Keith O'Brien of St. Andrews and Edinburgh, president of the Bishops' Conference of Scotland, said he was "delighted" that a majority of people were against the Human Embryology and Fertilization Bill.

In an April 3 statement, he said he hoped Prime Minister Gordon Brown would "take notice of the result and reconsider the need for this legislation."

"It is time the government focused its attention on supporting and funding stem-cell research which is both ethical and effective," Cardinal O'Brien said.

"Our government deliberately ignored this proven research in favor of the morally bankrupt blind alley of embryo destruction," he added. "As a result of such willful ignorance on the part of (the) government we risk losing an entire generation of our top scientific minds to other countries who see the potential in their work and support it where we fail."

The poll, conducted by Opinion Research Business on behalf of the Scottish Catholic Media Office, asked how strongly people opposed or supported such research. Of the 1,000 people interviewed, 67 percent opposed -- and 51 percent of those strongly opposed -- any moves to create hybrid embryos.

The bill, which will return to Parliament this spring before it can be passed into law later this year, proposes to create three types of animal-human embryos for experimentation. These include true or pure hybrids that are 50 percent human and 50 percent animal.

The bill also proposes the creation of "savior siblings" -- children created principally to provide donor tissue for a sick brother or sister -- and the abolition of the legal principle that fertility clinics should consider the need of a child for a father when offering in vitro fertilization.

Brown wrote to all the Labor Party politicians March 25, saying that "lives will be saved" and "treatments and cures will be available" as a result of the research.

In his April 3 statement, Cardinal O'Brien, who has a degree in science, said Brown's claims were not only "complete scientific fantasy but are blatantly untrue."

He said they presented a "cruel deception to the thousands of families caring for an ill relative who may benefit from stem-cell therapies."

"Since Gordon Brown is intent on making hopelessly inaccurate statements on scientific matters he clearly doesn't understand, I would urge him to consider meeting some of the scientists in this field and would be glad to facilitate just such a meeting," he said.

The Opinion Business Research poll is the second in two weeks to show widespread opposition to the plans.

In late March a survey conducted by ComRes found that 79 percent of 1,004 respondents thought it was important to consider a child's need for a father regarding in vitro fertilization and that 60 percent thought it was wrong to create animal-human embryos, with 33 saying they did not think it was wrong.

Fifty-one percent said they agreed that the creation of "savior siblings" denies the child a choice in how his or her body is used.