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Cloning an affront to human dignity: Pell

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THE nation's most senior Catholic has attacked therapeutic cloning as an affront to human dignity and called on his flock to lobby senators to thwart a push to legalise the research.

Cardinal George Pell yesterday told *The Australian* that cloning was philosophically unsustainable and put scientific or commercial curiosity ahead of human life.

"We pray that parliament will make a decision based on universal ethics, not on populist rhetoric," said Cardinal Pell, the Archbishop of Sydney.

The churchman's entry into the debate came after a survey of senators conducted by *The Australian* suggested a private member's bill that would lift a ban on cloning was likely to be passed when it is debated in the Senate next week.

It also came as doctors opposing cloning completed plans for a \$100,000 advertising campaign beginning in today's newspapers.

Therapeutic cloning occurs when a scientist injects adult genetic material into a human or animal egg that has been stripped of its nucleus.

Researchers would allow the resulting embryo to grow for up to 14 days and harvest its stem cells for research.

While supporters believe the technique could lead to major developments in the war against disease, Cardinal Pell said all Christians, not just Catholics, held the protection of innocent life as a basic human value and an issue of justice.

"No theology is necessary to hold this view," Cardinal Pell said. "This view is certainly compatible with Catholic faith but is based on natural law -- broad ethical principles accessible to everyone -- which place the protection of human life above the casual or commercial curiosity of scientists."

Cardinal Pell said the protection of human life in medical research was enforced every day, citing complex consent mechanisms required for proposed human drug trials.

But he said pro-cloners seemed to believe such principles should be suspended because of the possible research benefits stemming from cloning.

He also said pro-cloners put the desires of the living ahead of the protection of the unborn.

And they asserted that that purpose for which a human embryo was created -- either for reproduction or research -- somehow altered its human dignity.

Advertisements placed in major newspapers today argue that research using adult stem cells holds more potential than research using cloned embryonic material.

David van Gend, of the lobby group Do No Harm -- Australians for Ethical Stem Cell Research, authorised the advertisements, which were partly funded by the 200-member Doctors Against Cloning group.

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