Joint Appeal Against Human and Animal Patenting

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Most Reverend William B. Friend
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Dear Bishop Friend:

As you know, the Joint Appeal Against Human and Animal Patenting, of which you are a signatory, held a press conference on Thursday, May 18th in Washington, D.C. More than 185 religious leaders, from 80 faiths and denominations, announced their opposition to the patenting of genetically engineered animals and human genes, cell lines, tissues, organs, and embryos.

The event was well covered by the press and television networks. Front page stories have appeared in newspapers across the country. ABC, CBS, and CNN all covered the issue on their network evening news.

Although many different views were presented at the press conference, the following are among the key points.

1. The participants do not oppose the effort to use genetic engineering to create new drugs and cure diseases. They argue, however, that the genetic blueprints of life are the province of God and cannot be owned as "patented inventions" by any human being or institution.

2. The very idea that the genetic blueprints of all of life are human inventions simply because scientists discover them is like asserting that chlorine and the other chemical elements found in nature also should have been patentable by the scientists who first isolated their properties.

life ≠ DNA

3. By turning life into patented inventions, the government drains life of its intrinsic nature and sacred value. Inventions are merely instrumental and driven by the logic of engineering values -- including efficiency, utility, profitability and quantifiability. There is no place in the world of machines for love, empathy, stewardship, reverence and awe.

4. By redefining God's Creation as "inventions", the government lays the legal and philosophical foundation for scientists and companies to assume the role of God. Inventions are made to be upgraded, streamlined and perfected -- raising the prospect of potential abuse and misuse of human and animal genetic traits.

5. The biotech companies protest that their only interest is to cure diseases, develop life-saving drugs and create more efficient farm products, and that patents are needed to insure an adequate return on their investment. What they don't mention is that much of the money that has gone into their research has come not from investors, but from American taxpayers in the form of government subsidies for the basic research. Now these same companies want to benefit a second time by being given an exclusive monopoly to commercially exploit genetically engineered animals and human genes and cells as patented inventions. Patent monopolies will mean that needy patients will be charged exorbitant fees for many life saving drugs.

6. Some of the religious leaders attending the press conference pointed out that there are many successful products on the market today, including drugs, medical procedures and farm products which are not "protected" by patents. A patent is simply the guarantee of an exclusive government "monopoly" to an individual or company to market an "invention" for a given number of years without having to fear competition by other companies. While the biotech companies might consider it heresy, said one of the participants, the fact is that some things in life are more important that "monopolizing" profits. Life is more than a commodity. The blueprints of God's creation should not be handed over to scientists and corporations just to insure greater profits.

We are sending you, by mail, some newsclips of the press event as well as the statements from Dr. Richard Land, Executive Director, The Christian Life Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention; Bishop Kenneth Carder of The United Methodist Church; Rabbi David Saperstein, Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism; and Abdurahman Alamoudi, Executive Director, American Muslim Council, all of whom attended the press conference.

We'll keep you updated on any future developments.

Sincerely,

Jaydee Hanson
General Board of Church and Society
The United Methodist Church

Jeremy Rifkin
Foundation on Economic Trends