Committee: Health Committee

Question: What are the constraints necessary to genetic modification of the human gene pool?

Author: Vatican City State

During the last few decades, the world has experienced the appearance of new technology in the field of science which allows the artificial modification of human genes. The emergence of this knowledge could symbolize the end of some problems, but at the same time the creation of issues that could pose a threat to the human race. Concerning genetic modifications on human beings, the Vatican City State defends its limited use, and exclusively in a very limited context.

Since 1972, when the first transfer of DNA form one organism to another was accomplished, humankind has wondered what genetic engineering on the human species could allow. Nowadays, several types of genetic modifications which different purposes have been planned. Gene therapy, a specific treatment planned to cure and/or avoid certain diseases could be used worldwide to eradicate sicknesses with a genetic origin such as HIV or sickle cell anemia and thus transmit the therapeutic effects to the individual`s offspring. This could lead to the disappearance of problematic diseases, therefore helping the development of certain countries and increasing today’s society’s well-being.

On the other hand, gene enhancement tries to improve natural traits belonging to a human being. This method would allow parents to decide the physical and mental characteristics of their offspring. It would enhance individuals by an upgrade of traits such as intelligence and physical strength which would theoretically help develop the human species.

The Vatican City State acknowledges the chances offered by the appearance of genetic engineering, but advocates a restricted use.

The Vatican City State considers morally licit the use of Somatic cell gene therapy (that is to say the elimination of genetic defects on the level of all cells except the reproductive cells) as a way to restore the normal genetic configuration of the patient without harming the individual and with his consent. The use of Germ line cell therapy is declared morally illicit by the Vatican City State due to the fact that implementing a modification of this type on an individual would also modify the genetic configuration of the individual’s offspring. Plus, this genetic manipulation at the present time isn’t fully controllable and thus could harm the progeny. The City State condemns the future use of genetic modifications to enhance the human being. The possibility to decide a future offspring’s traits would lead to the predominance of certain characteristics considered as ideal by a society and therefore rupture peace between individuals. This selection of ideal traits could be compared to the search of racial purity by the Nazi regime during the 1930s and 1940s which divided the German society. The accessibility to this enhancement would produce further segregation between individuals due to the fact that only a small part of the world’s population would afford this treatment. Furthermore, as with Germ line therapy, these manipulations aren’t fully controlled and could harm the individual, and as the International Bioethics Committee announced; “Interventions on the human genome should be admitted only for preventive, diagnostic or therapeutic reasons and without enacting modifications for descendants.” The alternative would “jeopardize the inherent and therefore equal dignity of all human beings and renew eugenics”.

In conclusion, the Vatican City State recommends the restrained use of genetic engineering on humans, restricting it to therapeutic intentions only on single individuals as a method to restore the normal genetic configuration. The Church also recalls the importance of peace between men that could be jeopardized by some of these manipulations. It also reminds the need to respect human nature as it is.