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Research methods spur ethical debates

Cardinal John O'Connor, archbishop of New York, testified March 13 before a New York State Senate committee examining the subject of human cloning. Cardinal O'Connor said he was concerned that if human cloning ever came to pass, it would inevitably entail the destruction of the tiniest of humans in laboratory settings.

"What are we to do with or say of the 'mishaps,' the 'mistakes,' the less-than-perfect tries and results?" the cardinal said. "Do we just discard them as 'near misses,' as with research for improved salad or motor oil?"

Concerns about cloning are coming from many quarters since a federal commission recommended in June that privately funded researchers be allowed to create cloned human embryos for research — but not for implantation in mothers' wombs.

"The final outcome of experimentation on (cloned) embryos is destruction of embryos," said Dr. Michael Aiello, president of the Catholic Physicians' Guild of the Diocese of Rochester. "That would be expressly immoral."

Aiello's position was shared by Dr. David Byers, executive director for the Committee on Science and Human Values of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

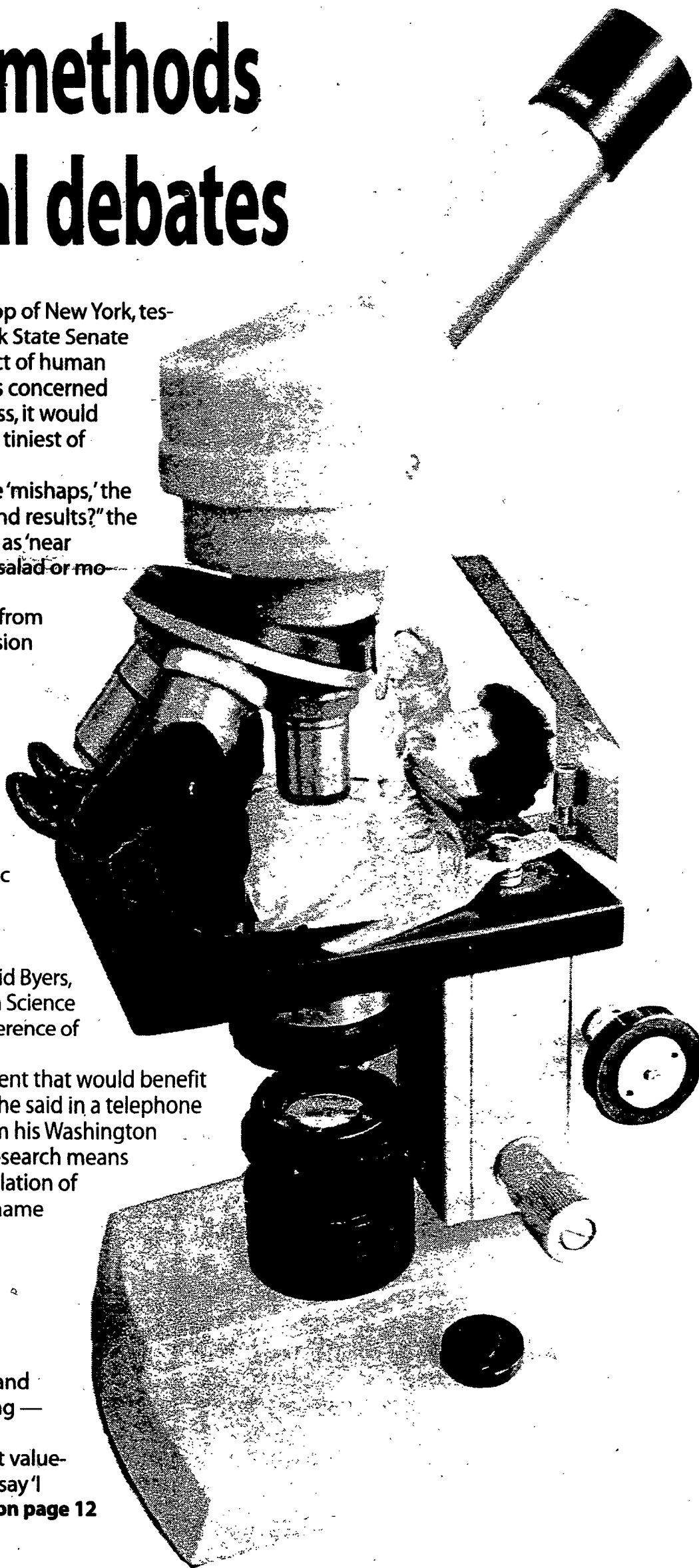
"If you could conceive of an experiment that would benefit the embryo ... that would be justified," he said in a telephone interview with the *Catholic Courier* from his Washington office. But, he added, human cloning research means human embryo destruction, a clear violation of church teaching against killing in the name of science.

Ethics, research & experimentation

Cardinal O'Connor concluded his testimony before the state Senate by pointing out that all types of research and experimentation — and not just cloning — are subject to moral debate.

"Research proposals," he said, "are not value-neutral ... It is simply not acceptable to say 'I

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Story by Rob Cullivan • Photo illustration by Matthew Scott