

WORLD & NATION

'Moral' process suggested for harvesting stem cells

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Stem cells like those extracted from the human embryo could be obtained from a morally less problematic source, according to Dr. William Hurlbut, a member of the President's Council on Bioethics.

In a July report by the council, Hurlbut proposed developing a process called altered nuclear transfer that would create an entity that would not be a human embryo, but would be a source of cells that are comparable to embryonic stem cells.

"At this early stage in our technological control of developing life, we have an opportunity to break the impasse over stem-cell research and provide moral guidance for the biotechnology of the future," said Hurlbut, a human biology professor at Stanford University in California.

Vatican and U.S. Catholic officials have said a human embryo has the rights and dignity of a human being.

Stem cells occur in embryonic, fetal and adult tissues and can give rise to specialized cells that make up the tissues and organs of the body. They have the potential to be used in treatments for a range of diseases and conditions. However, embryonic stem-cell research is morally problematic, because extracting stem cells destroys the embryo.

Although recent research with adult stem cells suggests that they can develop into a wide variety of tissue types and may therefore be as versatile as embryonic

stem cells, many scientists still want stem-cell research to continue along the broadest possible front, that is, with both adult and embryonic cells.

Borrowing from the cloning techniques of somatic cell nuclear transfer, Hurlbut hopes to allow a broad range of research to go forward by bypassing one central moral concern.

Somatic cell nuclear transfer is the method typically used in both cloning for biomedical research and cloning to produce children. It results in what "deserves on functional grounds to be called an embryo," according to the council's report. This embryo would be destroyed to obtain stem cells.

Hurlbut told Catholic News Service that he wants people to recognize that tissues with "partial generative potential" may be used for medical benefit without a violation of human dignity, which he said is grounded in the full human organism and not in individual parts like genes and organs.

At a June meeting of the President's Council on Bioethics in Washington, Hurlbut explained why he hoped the council would support his proposal.

"I personally think if we could define the boundaries of the moral problem more clearly and at least make some clear territory, for if you could do this, you would have the consensus, I think that would be a real contribution," he said. "I



Reuters/CNS

Mother Teresa remembered

Barefoot Missionaries of Charity pray at the tomb of Mother Teresa in Calcutta, India, on the 92nd anniversary of her birth Aug. 26. Mother Teresa, whose work with the poor gained her international recognition and the Nobel Peace Prize, died in 1997. Her order has grown to 4,000 nuns of 80 nationalities. They serve in 129 countries with 676 houses, 214 of them in India.

don't think what I'm suggesting is unrealistic and neither did certain developmental biologists I talked with."

Robert P. George, a member of the council and a law professor at Princeton University, said at the meeting that he saw one particular benefit of altered nuclear transfer: If it can create a morally less problematic source of stem cells similar to those extracted from the embryo, it

might inspire more support for a moratorium on cloning for biomedical research. This could include support from people who are not concerned about harming human embryos, and want research cloning and work with embryonic stem cells to go forward.

Hurlbut said he hopes his proposal will be discussed more at the Sept. 12-13 President's Council on Bioethics meeting.

N. Ireland police stretched thin

DUBLIN, Ireland (CNS) — After 15 months of almost-continuous street violence between Protestants and Catholics in North Belfast, Northern Ireland's police force is being stretched to the breaking point, said acting Chief Constable Colin Cramphorn.

In the last year, more than 730 police officers have been injured in the almost-nightly street disturbances in North Belfast. About 10 percent of officers of the Police Service of Northern Ireland are on sick leave, mainly due to stress and fatigue, Cramphorn said.

"In many areas we are simply responding to emergency calls and little else. By interposing ourselves day after day, month after month, between the communities in a few closely defined geographic areas, primarily in Belfast, we have prevented them from descending into an orgy of violence that

would have surely cost many more lives and caused widespread destruction," Cramphorn said in a report to the police board's corporate policy committee.

In addition to sectarian street violence, the police also have had to tackle increasing paramilitary activity. Loyalists, mainly Protestants, want Northern Ireland to remain a province of Great Britain while nationalists, mainly Catholics, want Northern Ireland united with the Irish Republic.

The struggle against terrorism is now at an "intensity greater than at any time since the 1997 cessations of hostilities," Cramphorn said.

"Much of this effort goes unseen and unnoticed by the population at large and is, therefore, not recognized or credited. But it is a significant diversion of resources away from normal policing," he said.

N.Y. shock jocks lose jobs over lewd stunt in church

NEW YORK (CNS) — A New York radio station canceled its popular "Opie and Anthony Show" and fired the show's hosts Aug. 22 in the wake of criticism of the Aug. 15 broadcast of a couple allegedly having sex in St. Patrick's Cathedral.

"Based on recent events, the 'Opie and Anthony Show' has been canceled and will be replaced by other programming," the radio company said in an Aug. 22 statement.

Initially, the syndicated afternoon drive-time radio show had been suspended by the station's owner, Infinity Broadcasting Operations Inc. The show was canceled when the Federal Communications Commission announced that it was opening an official investigation into the broadcast.

The FCC had received hundreds of "outraged e-mails and phone calls" complaining about the radio broadcast and FCC Commissioner Michael Copps had said the complaints were "on the fast track" for being considered by his agency. If they proved true, he said in an Aug. 19 statement, "this commission should consider the strongest action possible against this station, up to and including revocation of the station's license."

The Aug. 15 stunt was part of the radio show's contest which offered prizes to couples having sex in the riskiest locations of the city.

The couple and a producer for the radio show who was providing listeners with details of the couple's activity were arrested shortly after 4 p.m. in a side area of the cathedral. The church had been filled with Mass-goers throughout the day for the feast of the Assumption, but no afternoon Masses were celebrat-

ed between 2 and 5:30 p.m. that day.

Police identified the couple as Loretta Lynn Harper, 35, of Alexandria, Va., and her boyfriend, Brian Florence, 37, of Quantico, Va. They were arraigned Aug. 16 on charges of obscenity in the third degree and public lewdness. Paul Mercurio of New York, who allegedly provided the live commentary, was arraigned the same day on a charge of "acting in concert" with Harper and Florence. The couple's lawyer maintains they were simulating sex.

William Donohue, president of the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, said his group wanted Infinity Broadcasting Operations fined and the license of WNEW revoked.

But after the show was canceled, he called it "a refreshing example of corporate responsibility" and said he would petition the FCC to stop its investigation of the incident.

"There is no reason now to revoke the license of WNEW," he said in an Aug. 22 statement.

In June the Federal Communications Commission cited three of the radio show's past broadcasts as indecent and fined Infinity Broadcasting Operations \$21,000.

Donohue initially said he would press the case before the FCC and seek the "maximum penalties for this assault on human decency. Not only was a crime committed — this stunt was a textbook case of how obscenity and blasphemy track each other."

Joseph Zwilling, spokesman for the New York Archdiocese, called the radio stunt "disgusting" and said he did not want to give "these radio people any more publicity."

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