

Editorials

Mother Goose . . . An Apologia

At the risk of falling off a wall and knowing full well the importance of inculcating the Christian message in whatever means possible, we still must admit to a very squeamish feeling at the plight of some well-meaning folks slicing up Mother Goose.

We also must tell the truth. We never felt any particular loyalty to that legendary author of Mother Goose's Melodies — until now when some of the villagers have taken to eviscerating her publicly.

To get to the meat of the problem. A common denominator for us all (and can't we hear it being cadenced in rumbling tones at this very moment) is: "Fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell the blood of an Englishman. Be he alive or be he dead, I'll grind his bones to make my bread."

Ghastly! Yes. Gory! To be sure. But more than, it is original. It is poetic. And its message is brought home on the wings of fright — there are some unholy cutups out there. It bolstered our fear of unworldly monsters, much as Christianity itself does.

Further, it was not our dear, kind protagonist Jack who was bellowing threats but rather that embodiment of meanness, the giant whom we our-

selves might come across if we wandered too far from home.

What this is all about, dear reader, is the fact that a new book is out — the Christian Mother Goose. It is available at Christian bookstores. Its version of this blood-curdling tale goes like this: "Fee, fi, fo, fum, I smell cookies that smell yum, yum. Be they oatmeal or gingerbread, before I eat them, I'll bow my head."

Now, not one of us could downplay that call to prayerful thanks for the good cookies of life. But we really shouldn't be encouraging the kiddies to desire all that flour and sugar.

Similarly with Humpty Dumpty. Again we are all probably unhappy with Humpty's plight but who knows, maybe it kept some of us from precarious wall-sitting. In any event, sadness, too, is part and parcel of life. Christians know that. But, oh yes, the new verse: "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall; Humpty Dumpty shouted, 'Amen! God can put me together again.'"

Revisionism is not a respectable pastime. Rather than resorting to it, we think the Christian message should be brought to our youngsters originally, creatively. And please let's not remove the spiders, the dragons, the monsters from our fantasies. After all, we come across them in real life, too.

KKK Candidate

Now that the election is over we wonder about the protest that wasn't made concerning a Catholic bishop urging voters to take a particular stance.

No, we are not referring to Cardinal Medeiros and the abortion issue. We mean Bishop Leo T. Maher of San Diego who issued a pastoral letter attacking the Ku Klux Klan and admonishing the 346,000 Catholics in San Diego and Imperial counties to "resist vigorously" an organization that fosters "the sin of racism."

An avowed KKK racist was the candidate of the Democratic party for Congress from those counties. At presstime, we did not know the outcome of his effort. But the point is that Bishop Maher called on Catholics to examine "bald, crass, racial hatred in our own community . . . rising from the ignorance and hatred of the past and being torn anew in that infamous organization known as the Ku Klux Klan."

"Anyone who follows this editorial page knows we couldn't agree more with Bishop Maher. But that is not the point here. Where were all the people who protested the right of Cardinal Medeiros to speak up publicly on what he considers to be a moral issue of the election? Was not Bishop Maher doing precisely the same thing in a different context? Do not religious leaders who protest capital punishment (as we do also) do the same thing?"

Most Americans would agree that all citizens, regardless of position or lack of it, have a right and a duty to express themselves on all issues. We think the key to the protests of Cardinal Medeiros lies in the prejudiced motives of the protestors. They are afraid of what he is saying so they want to shut him up. It's that simple.

and Opinions

Fragile Ones' A Poor Tem

Editor: Congratulations on what appears to be the beginning of a potentially excellent series on the shortage of priests in our diocese. I wish, however, to register my personal objection to the patronizing and demeaning language employed in the first article in which some priests are referred to as the "fragile ones" and in which the point is made that among these "fragile ones" are those who eventually leave.

I heard a clergyman a few years ago make the statement that: "We have a lot of clergy in this diocese, who are fragile." He has since retired early due to declining health. My point is this: there is a sense in which all of us are fragile. We are after all, "earthen vessels" and perhaps we need to recall that God often uses the weak among us to confound the wise. The insipid use of a term such as "fragile ones" is demeaning to the clergy. One wonders what makes them fragile. Is one judged "fragile" if he does not, in some way, conform or fit

into the presteral mold? Or is one constitutionally fragile born with some genetic malfunction which keeps him whimpering and limping to the Bishop's door for help?

To state that the "fragile ones" eventually leave the ministry is very condescending. I think the opposite is true. It takes a lot of guts to change careers mid-stream. Any priest I have known who has left the ministry has been anything but "fragile." I refuse to accept the line of reasoning which implies that to leave the ministry is a sign of weakness. Just not true.

I think we need to be very careful about the public language we employ. It is often demoralizing when it could be, instead, very healing and life-giving. If no one loves them, the Lord speaks nothing but a clear and poignant word of love and hope to His suffering and broken people, and often, as I have said, uses them in ways that are shattering to those presumed to be the "strong and wise" among us.

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Century of Debate Arose in Garden

By Jay Merwin
Religious News Service

Father Gregor Johann Mendel, the 19th century Augustinian monk, used bags of paper and calico to protect his plants against accidental cross-pollination during a series of botanical experiments now recognized as the foundation of modern genetic theory.

In 1978, more than a century later, the movie "Demon Seed" portrayed an independent-minded computer which somehow forcibly impregnated the lovely wife of a scientist who created it. The computer, it seemed, coveted her genes and sought to reproduce its own intelligence through her.

It will take more than calico and common sense to ensure safe use of modern biomedical developments which now enable scientists to alter the genetic composition of living organisms. There is potential in these revelations for calculated genetic exclusion of hereditary human diseases and malformations as well as for a utilitarian "mix 'n match" approach to reproduction.

A presidential panel recently announced plans to study the ethical issues surrounding genetic research and to suggest ways for government to monitor it.

The President's Commission for the Study of Ethical Problems in Medicine and Biomedical Research was responding to a joint request submitted last June by Bishop Thomas Kelly, OP, general secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops; Claire Randall, general secretary of the National Council of Churches; and Rabbi Bernard Mandelbaum, general secretary of the Synagogue Council of America.

The interfaith statement was drafted in the wake of a June 16 U.S. Supreme Court decision extending federal patent protection to new bacteria created in a General Electric Co. laboratory. The patent applies to a new organism designed to break up oil spills.

The patented bacteria were created through the burgeoning recombinant deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) technology known as "gene splicing." The procedure involves splitting the rings of genes and inserting new sections so that they recombine in a new genetic pattern. DNA is the determining chemical of heredity which tells each living cell what to make and what its spin-off cells can become.

In what has been described as "the first major flower" of recombinant DNA, Genentech Inc., a private research firm, has begun tests on a new synthetic insulin for diabetics whose bodies typically lack sufficient amounts of the substance to digest sugars and carbohydrates. By programming bacteria to produce insulin, researchers hope to produce a substance that is more acceptable to human body chemistry than the traditional insulin substitute derived from animals.

In other developments, researchers at the University of California in Los Angeles last April transplanted two different types of genes into the cells of laboratory mice.

And in September, two scientists at Yale University successfully implanted foreign genes into mouse embryos, thus altering the animal's basic genetic composition. The technology can put within human reach the power to weed out forms of mental retardation, Tay-Sachs disease, sickle cell anemia and other genetic defects by replacing the suspect genes with new ones.

Gene splicing, coupled with recent advances in reproduction research, raises the spectre of a genetic

monopoly in which certain personal traits are banished from existence. But who will have the ultimate authority over what constitutes a "good" or a "bad" gene?

Employing a method called amniocentesis, physicians can extract cells from a fetus in the womb between the 16th and 18th week of pregnancy to check for abnormalities such as mental retardation. The sex of the fetus can also be determined.

The tests are often used to reassure parents who feared that certain recessive traits in their own genetic make-up would produce a physically or mentally damaged child. But the results of amniocentesis could lead to abortions when genetic defects show up, or even when the parents really wanted a boy instead of the girl the mother happened to be carrying.

"Would you for instance want to conceive a child who will die of cancer at 40 if that tendency for the development of cancer can be shown before birth?" asks one of the developers of amniocentesis, Dr. Cecil B. Jacobson, chief of the Reproductive Genetics Unit at George Washington University.

"Naturally, at this point we're not able to do that. But if we could tell what fetuses are going to be affected with cancer in their 40s and 50s, I would be for aborting them now. That would eliminate some types of cancer forever."

The Rev. Joseph Fletcher, author of the controversial book "Situation Ethics," takes that argument a step further. At a 1979 Symposium on Genetics and Law in Boston, he said, "coercive or compulsory control is justified," in cases where carriers of genetic disease do not abstain voluntarily from having children.

Seeking the middle ground, a theological task force commissioned by the National Council of Churches attempted to establish a Christian framework for understanding genetic technology as a purely amoral agent, rather than one which is inherently good or evil.

While acknowledging the hazards of "playing God," the report pointed out: "First, God acts through the processes of nature. Second, God acts through human beings and their deeds."

Thus, the NCC Panel on Human Life and the New Genetics said, "theologically understood, God may work as truly through intentionally human genetic acts as through the humanly unintended genetic processes that have made humanity genetically what it is now."

As early as 1975, evangelical Christian scholars seemed to take the same view. In a statement entitled "Evangelical Perspectives on Human Engineering," a 20-member commission argued that "genetic planning" should consider, among other things, the implications of bearing and not bearing children who may be seriously deformed, and the social consequences of caring for deformed children.

The panel also warned against "unnecessary alarm and ignorance of developments" in general public attitudes.

Others, however, are more fearful. "When we move from concern for the well-being of the individual to concern for society as a whole, we tend to start looking at what is sufficient for society," said the Rev. Robert Brungs, SJ, associate professor of physics and theological studies at St. Louis University. "With that type of view freedom can be eroded."

He believes that the Roman Catholic Church "has not addressed this to the degree that it must. To do so is a major task for the future."



HOW IS HE WHEN YOU'RE NOT PLAYING THE SLIM WHITMAN RECORDS?