

Debate on 'altered foods' works against the hungry



George Weigel

The Catholic Difference

to spend \$175 million battling biotech foods over the next five years. Not one dime of this will go to the starving poor. Greenpeace policies bring misery, disease and death to millions of people in developing countries, particularly in Africa."

Are hungry people being used as pawns in an ideological debate? That would be a nasty business indeed. GMO proponents concede that there are cautions to be observed in deploying new agro-technologies. Why won't the critics of GMOs concede that the burden of available scientific evidence is against their case?

Theological confusions are also in play here. An American Jesuit, Father Roland Lessups, told the Rome conference that "the right to use other creatures does not give us the right to abuse them." Fair enough as a principle. But since when are wheat and maize "creatures"?

In Zambia, the Jesuit-led resistance to GMOs convinced the government to reject a compromise solution: Zambian milling of U.S.-donated GMO relief maize. Milled maize cannot propagate, so the alleged environmental issue collapses. Yet the Jesuits led the charge against Zambian-milled GMOs. Why? Because ideology is trumping compassion and common sense?

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A November conference at the Vatican helped surface one of the most important debates in global Catholic social-justice circles today. The argument involves "genetically modified organisms" or GMOs. Critics call GMOs "Frankenfood" or worse. Proponents see GMOs as the way to feed hungry peoples whose food supply is threatened by natural disaster, insect infestation or other blights.

GMO critics have rallied some Catholic leaders behind their anti-"Frankenfood" campaign. Last year, the bishops of South Africa declared that "it is morally irresponsible to produce and market genetically modified food." Some Brazilian and Filipino bishops have also condemned biotech foods. These agitations have had real effect: Catholic activists in Zambia, for example, have persuaded that government to reject food aid that includes GMOs — despite widespread hunger in Zambia.

According to the *National Catholic Reporter's* John Allen, GMO critics raised three issues at the recent Vatican conference: possible environmental harm; possible health risks; and "potential for growing dependence upon commercial seeds and chemicals among poor farmers." Studies by reputable scientists suggest that concerns about GMO damage to the environment or GMO health risks are largely unsubstantiated and typically exaggerated.



Mike Crupl/Catholic Courier

take up arms or carry them about for any reason."

Mark Scibilia-Carver
Cold Springs Road
Trumansburg

'Full import' hitting home

To the editor:

In June of 2002 when the American Bishops voted for Zero Tolerance for priests who are accused of child molestation, I thought that it was an appropriate vote. The past week has taught me that that may not be so.

It seems that Zero Tolerance means that a priest who is under investigation for one alleged offense, allegedly committed 24 years ago, has no rights. His picture is shown on TV, there are pieces about him in the newspaper, he is suspended from his job, forbidden to function as a priest. He is in fact found to be guilty until proven innocent.

Looking at that Zero Tolerance vote now, having learned its full import, I can't help but wonder. I wonder how it could be that a gathering of our Bishops, men of Learning, Prayerfulness and Wisdom, could not find a way to keep our children safe, except at the expense of our priests.

Dorothy J. Barbehenn
Bonnie Brae Avenue
Rochester

Opts to kneel

To the editor:

In a recent bulletin of Mother of Sorrows, our pastor tells us that the Revised

General Instruction of the Roman Missal from Rome "invites" us all to remain standing from the Our Father through distribution of Communion.

Is it an invitation or a mandate? Its purpose for revising the Mass liturgy seems to be "a sign that reception of the Eucharist unites us as the one Body of Christ."

Isn't the humble, reverent, and worshipping congregation on its knees before the priest-elevated Host while praying, "Lord, I am not worthy to receive you..." a sufficient sign that we communicants are one body in Christ, both before receiving the Eucharist, praying in preparation that Christ will forgive us, and after receiving Him, returning to humbly thank Him on our knees in a most personal way for His Divine Gift to us?

Methinks, I'll always take the latter.

Kenn Scullin
Denise Road
Greece

Don't shake

To the editor:

I believe it would be prudent to suspend the ritual of hand shaking during the winter months.

All the health experts say that the hands are a great spreader of germs. See the article "Don't share your flu this season" in the *Democrat and Chronicle* of Friday, Nov. 21.

I dislike shaking hands in the winter but not to be rude, I do. Many people feel as I do.

Peter J. Mauro
Coran Circle
Rochester

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