**Whaling:**

**A Resource to be Used or a Species to be Protected**

An Insight into Modern Whaling and Christianity

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*Introduction*

Before man starting searching the oceans for new land and new resources, whales were abundant in number. They were hunted primarily for food, clothing, and other domestic purposes by coastal communities in small boats and hand-held harpoons. It was after man built larger ships, invented steam locomotion and moved from small rowboats to fast catcher ships with grenade tipped harpoons that whaling turned into a large scale industry; whale oil and whale bone fueled the economy of many nations. This industry rose and fell with whale populations and continued until few whales were left and the profit decreased. Thankfully fuel and lubricating oils were invented to replace whale oils. Unfortunately for the whales, the hunting did not stop completely. Coastal Aboriginals such as the Inuit of Northern Canada and the Eskimos of Alaska still maintain their traditional of taking whales to feed their communities.

The main controversy of modern whaling is the scientific research of Japan which consists of killing whale in an Antarctic whale sanctuary and selling the meat in fish markets to fund future research. Anti-whaling groups, such as the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society led by Paul Watson, follow the Japanese fleet and harass the whalers as they try to kill escaping whales. These actions cause tension between whaling nations and non whaling nations and the International Whaling Commission is caught in the middle of keeping its own mandate.

As Christians, we need to look at our own mandate of being stewards of God’s creation in accordance with Genesis 2:15; looking at Leviticus 11 and Jewish dietary laws also provide some insight to how Christians should response to the consumption of whale meat; whales are not to be consumed for food and Christians should be on the side of environmentalists who are doing what they can to protect the whales from the whaling fleets.

Whaling is a cultural tradition and social focal point in whaling nations. The taking of whales for food is to be enforced with a resourceful management policy similar to the policy of hunting deer, moose, and other large game. The regulation of whaling for the sole purpose of food to support a community is to be strictly enforced by the IWC and supporting associates. Lethal scientific whaling should be stopped and new methods for studying whales should be implemented in accordance with the stewardship of God’s creation. Christians and scientists need to take a more active stand alongside conservation groups to continue to protect whale species to ensure their survival.

*A History Lesson in Whaling*

The first whalers were known as the Basque whalers. They hunted whales from shore in the Bay of Biscay near the Pyrenees Mountains (Francis, 1990). The earliest records show that the Basque whalers began hunting whales in the 11th Century; they possibly adapted techniques from the Normans and the Vikings to the north (Francis, 1990). The Normans and the Vikings capture whales by herding them into narrow, shallow bays; this method could not be accomplished because the Bay of Biscay had smoother shores therefore the Basque whalers developed the technique of chasing the whales from boats in the open water (Francis, 1990). From October to March, there would be whales in the vicinity of the bay. Watchers would see if any whales would come in close to shore. When a watcher would see a whale spout near the shore, he would alert the village by beating drum, waving a flag or ringing a bell. The hunters would run down to their boats and pursue the whale (Francis, 1990). The harpooner in the boat would wait until the boat was close enough to the whale and thrust a V shaped harpoon into the whale’s back; this was to tire the whale, not kill it immediately (Francis, 1990). More harpoons would be thrust into the whale, buoys made from dried gourds were attached to act as a drag and to help the hunters keep an eye on their target (Francis, 1990). The whale would then become exhausted and the boats would catch up to it. One hunter would stab the whale with a long spear like lance repeatedly until the whale would spout blood; this hit a vital organ or blood vessel had been ruptured and the whale was dying (Francis, 1990). A large boat would arrive to help tow the carcass back to the shore. At high tide, the whale was brought up on the shore and the blubber was removed with flensing knives and then cut up into smaller pieces to be boiled down into whale oil (Francis, 1990).

It was believed that whales changed their habits from swimming close to shore to swimming out in the open ocean which lead to the decreasing success of a small fishery in Bay of Biscay (Burton, 1993). This caused the Basque whalers to travel farther out to find whales. As the Europeans began their voyages across the Atlantic to discover new lands, whaling fleets began to form; new whaling grounds were discovered in Newfoundland and the Basque whaling ships were quick to move in (Burton, 1993). Techniques similar to those of the Basque whalers of chasing the whale, tiring the whale by attaching drags, and then killing the whale were used; the carcass would be towed back to the parent ship instead of land (Burton, 1993). The whale would be processed on the side of the ship: the blubber would be stripped off and cut up into smaller pieces, the flesh was removed and the blubber was minced before being packed into barrels (Burton, 1993). The whale bone was cut out before the body was released and floated away (Burton, 1993).

A change in the growth of the whaling industry came in the 1800’s when a Norwegian sea captain name Svend Foyn developed new efficient techniques for killing thousands of whales on one sailing trip. Foyn first combined the function of boat and ship into one steam powered highly maneuverable vessel, fast enough to chase down a whale (Francis, 1990). These swift catcher boats would roam the open water, find and kill a whale, and then tow the carcass back to whaling stations on the shore for processing (Francis, 1990). This copied the Basque hunters who patrolled the Bay of Biscay, however the fleets of steamers were slaughtering sever hundred whales compared to the Basque hunters killing one or two whales (Francis, 1990). The next step was to shoot the whales from the deck of the catcher boats. Whalers were searching for an effective harpoon gun; a gun fired from a small boat tossing in the waves limited its accuracy (Francis, 1990). Early harpoon guns with explosives had a tendency to explode prematurely (Francis, 1990). Foyn’s achievement was attaching a cannon to the bow of a chase vessel on a swivel; this weapon fired the harpoon with a grenade screwed to the tip. The grenade exploded within a few seconds of becoming embedded in the whale, killing the animal rather than wounding it (Francis, 1990). It took Foyn a few whaling season to perfect his weapon to hold firmly and explode when it was suppose to (Francis, 1990). The rope attached to the harpoon would haul the whale in towards the catcher boat by a winch that was mounted on the deck in front of the deck house (Burton, 1993).

The whales hunted by the Basque were Biscayan right whales ( (Burton, 1993). Right whales are considered to be the “right” whales to hunt because they are slow and they do not sink when killed, making it easier to tow the whale (Burton, 1993).

Whale oil was used to fuel lamps in the streets, in churches and public buildings and served as a lubricant for machinery, a cleaner for wood, a leather softener, and was used in the preparation of soaps, medicines, and paint (Francis, 1990). Baleen, also known as whale bone, was used because it was stiff yet elastic and became pliable when immersed in hot water (Burton, 1993). Whale bone was used for umbrellas, fans, snuffboxes, chair springs, hairbrush bristles, walking sticks, shirt hoops, and corset stays (Francis, 1990).The meat was sold as a kind of fish in markets (Francis, 1990). Whale populations declined until the early 1900; in 1904 a law was created to prevent the killing of whales however Antarctica remained one area left unchecked; 1935 saw regulations decreasing the size of whale catches and in 1937 most nations signed the International Whaling Agreement to preserve whales on a international scale under the League of Nations (Burton, 1993).

*International Whaling Commission*

The International Whaling Commission IWC) was formed under the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling in 1946 for the purpose of governing the conduct of whaling throughout the world (International Whaling Commission). The IWC was determined to work out and administer regulations to conserve whale stocks and save the whaling industry; a scientific commission was formed to collect biological information on whales to help with creating a preservation plan (Burton, 1993). The IWC goals is to provide complete protection of certain species, designate whale sanctuaries and designate hunting locations, set catch limits and size limits on whale species, set dates for the opening and closing of seasons, and prohibits the capture of mothers and calves (International Whaling Commission).

IWC does not have set regulations for small cetacean management as it is separate from commercial whaling (International Whaling Commission). Aboriginal whaling and small community hunts such as the Faeroe Island of Denmark do not follow IWC commercial whaling regulations however matters of the conservation of small cetacean species at annual meetings; there is much discussion over whether or not the IWC should have international jurisdiction over the small cetaceans because whales are being killed for consumption but not on a large commercial scale (International Whaling Commission).

On July 23, 1982 the IWC members voted in favor of a moratorium on all commercial whaling (Ellis, 2003). After a decade of the moratorium, commercial whaling appeared to be over and the IWC was deprived of its mandate because all great whales were decimated to the point where there was doubt if they would fully recover (Ellis, 2003). Norway never gave up whaling as the whaling industry was vital to fishermen as a source of income and to protect fish stocks, Iceland resumed whaling after 14 years and Japan obtained scientific permits to hunt whales in Antarctic; the meat from the Japanese hunts ended up in fish markets to possibly fund future projects (Ellis, 2003).

Part of the goal of the IWC is the creation of whale sanctuaries. A whale sanctuary is an area closed off to whaling for a specific time of time; the whales are to be protected for their long term conservation (Morgera, 2004). The boundaries are set based on ecological considerations and the size should be adequate enough to fulfill the objectives of the created sanctuary such as the range of species or biologically significant whales (Morgera, 2004). The sanctuary should also apply to certain or all whale species and research should be based on non lethal techniques (Morgera, 2004). In 1992, France proposed that a sanctuary be created in the Southern Oceans around Antarctica at the 40⁰ S latitude for the protection of whale feeding grounds; the Southern Ocean sanctuary was established in 1994 (Morgera, 2004). Throughout all the commercial whaling debate, there were still smaller nations and cultures that depended in whales as a way of life.

*Whaling in a Cultural Context*

Aboriginal whaling has been seen by the IWC as a separate category from commercial whaling therefore each category has different management approaches (Reeves, 2002). Aboriginal subsistence whaling is defined as “for purposes of local aboriginal consumption carried out by or on behalf of aboriginal,

indigenous or native peoples who share strong community, familial, social and cultural ties related to a continuing traditional dependence on whaling and on the use of whales” (Reeves, 2002, p. 76). Overall, Aboriginal whalers hunted alone or in groups in boats made of sealskin or wood; the whale was speared by the hunters until death and then towed back to the shore to be divided among the community and surplus oil was sold to interior tribes so that no piece of the whale was wasted (Burton, 1993). South American Indians were famous for the harpooners to leap onto the back of the whale and stab the harpoon into the blow hole of the whale until blood was spurted out (Burton, 1993).

For the Inuit of Northern Canada and the Eskimos of Alaska, whaling is an important focal point in their lives. Whales are a source of food for the Inuit; scientific study as confirmed the whale meat has superior nutritional value when compared to store purchased imported foods like beef or pork and provides a rich source of vitamin A and C as well as iron (Freeman, 1998). Whales have created a cultural and social importance for the aboriginal whalers. Whaling and whales are common themes throughout the culture and community as there is a great dependence on animals as essential food and materials, creating rituals and etiquette for animals that are killed and to protect animals populations (Freeman, 1998). The spirituality of the Inuit and the Eskimos created a respect for nature; the Inuit and the Eskimo’s believe that the whale is a gift from a higher power (Freeman, 1998). Through this development of the culture, the social dynamic of the community formed into a highly elaborate whaling culture with a traditional social order enriched with a sense of community and sharing among the community (Freeman, 1998). A small economic importance developed as whale products became a source of gifts, items for barter, and exchange for money, good, or services (Freeman, 1998).

*Whaling in a Social Context*

Whaling for any small community is a very integral piece of the community; this is seen strongly in island communities. An example of important community based hunts is seen in the Faeroe Islands of Denmark. The Faeroe Islands have hunting records back to the 1584 of hunting pilot whales in narrow steep walled fjords; the harbor in one of these fjords must have a shore of mud or sand for easy stranding of the whales and must be up wind of the selected pod as pilot whales prefer to swim into the wind (Burton, 1993). In pilot whales, there is a strong herd instinct that the whalers use to their advantage; the boats form a semi circle around the pod and gently guide the pod into the cove and near the beach while on land, make shift flags signal the pod is nearing the beach and the message is sent as the highest priority throughout the community (Burton, 1993). The boats will herd the pod close to the beach before one whale is lanced in the tail to cause it to panic and swim towards the shore; the rest of the pod will follow the injured whale towards the beach until the entire pod is stranded (Burton, 1993). It is at this point where every available person runs down to the beach and begins to kill the whales by cutting the vital arteries in the head behind the blowhole with flensing knives; pregnant woman are not permitted because it is believed their presence on the beach will deter the whales from beaching (Burton, 1993). The whales are dragged up on the beach and officials being the task of dividing up the meat for distribution and blubber according to traditional Norse tallies and strict rules and laws, most altered to fit modern conditions: the largest whale is given to the first boat that sighted the pod, a portion of the meat goes to reimburse those who had gear damaged, another portion to the officials, and some is put aside for a feast at the end of the day (Burton, 1993). The remaining meat is divided among the community for the winter months to come; fresh meat is boiled and heart, liver, lips, and kidneys are fried while meat that is to be stored is dried and salted for the winter; only the head and flippers are discarded (Burton, 1993). This form of hunting provides the people of the Faeroe Islands with food for the winter months and takes place only on small community scales.

*Japan and Scientific Whaling*

Japan has a history of whaling, starting with the taking of beached whales by coastal fishing communities before the time of the harpoon (Catalinac, 2005). Japan quickly became a major whaling nation with help from the methods employed by the Norwegians to reach the Antarctic waters (Catalinac, 2005). Japan stood strong in the face of anti-whaling movements and still continued to hunt whales during the moratorium placed on commercial whaling by the IWC and still remained a member of the IWC (Catalinac, 2005). The development of the Japanese research program fell within the regulations of the IWC and Japan is granted permits by the IWC to kill, take, or treat whales for the purposes of scientific research and many of the results have been commended by the scientific committee of the IWC (Catalinac, 2005). Japan follows the rule of the IWC that states “any whales taken under these special permits shall so far as practicable be processed and the proceeds be dealt with in accordance with the directions issued by the governments;” this means the whale meat is allowed to be sold in fish markets as long as the proceeds go towards future research; this is what is happening with Japanese whaling research (Catalinac, 2005).

Japan’s whale research led to the formation of the Institute for Cetacean Research (ICR) in 1987 with the goal of specializing In the biological and social sciences of whales and dedication to a wide range of cetacean research (The Institute of Cetacean Research). However Japan uses two methods of research: lethal and non lethal research; non lethal research includes photo documentation, skin samples, and the whale is not killed while lethal research kills the whale and the whale is processed until the meat is packaged for sale in Japan (The Institute of Cetacean Research). The ICR has two main projects: sighting surveys and age composition and determination of whales (The Institute of Cetacean Research). The sighting surveys focus on determining the population of baleen whale species in the Southern Ocean Sanctuary while the age composition is determined by lethal means; the whale is killed by a catcher ship with a grenade tipped harpoon and processed by a factory ship where the exact age is determined by counting the growth rings of the ear plug in the baleen whale (The Institute of Cetacean Research).

*Sea Shepherd Conservation Society*

The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society (Sea Shepherd) was founded in 1997 by Paul Watson as an international non-profit, marine wildlife conservation organization (Sea Shepherd). With a goal of ending destruction of habitat and the slaughter of wildlife and to conserve and protect ecosystems, the Sea Shepherd uses direct tactics to investigate, document, and take action against illegal activities to safe guard the biodiversity of the world’s oceans (Sea Shepherd).

The Sea Shepherd has performed five Antarctic Whale Defense Campaigns to protect the whales against the attacks of Iceland, Norway, and Japan; Japan is the only one continuing to kill whales in the sanctuary (Sea Shepherd). The Sea Shepherd believes that Japan is killing whales under the guise of scientific research during a moratorium on commercial whaling and that the IWC does not have the capacity to enforce the moratorium (Sea Shepherd). The Sea Shepherd is part of the United Nations World Charter for Nature and is the only organization enforcing the international conservation regulations (Sea Shepherd).

*Sea Shepherd vs. Japan*

The Sea Shepherd has done three expeditions down to the Southern Ocean Sanctuary to halt the progress of the Japanese whaling fleet believing that Japan is whaling under the disguise of scientific research (Sea Shepherd). Their arsenal includes cameras for documentation of their actions as well as the actions of the Japanese, and rotten butter and methyl cellulose to stall the work of the Japanese workers on the whaling ships and to give the whale some time to escape; methyl cellulose becomes slippery when it comes in contact with water, making working conditions dangerous to Japanese workers (Sea Shepherd). The Sea Shepherd also rams the Japanese boats and has sent member to board the Japanese vessels (Sea Shepherd).

The Japanese consider the actions of the Sea Shepherd to be harassment and terrorism against scientific research authorized by the IWC (The Institute of Cetacean Research). Japan claims that Sea Shepherd are “eco-terrorists” and are endangering the lives of the workers on the Japanese whaling vessels. An example of this is the claim by Japan that the Sea Shepherd uses butyric acid; Japan claims butyric acid is extremely toxic and causes burns and blindness in those who come in contact with the chemical (The Institute of Cetacean Research). Sea Shepherd claims the butyric acid has a pH of 4.8 and that “lemon juice and spit is more dangerous” (Sea Shepherd). Butyric acid is a colorless liquid that is soluble in water and has an unpleasant smell of rancid butter; it is harmful if swallowed or inhaled, burns the skin and eyes and it is corrosive and is absorbed through the skin (Safety (MSDS) Data for Butyric Acid). As a result, it appears that Sea Shepherd does not use butyric acid as a deterrent against the Japanese (Sea Shepherd).

It can appear that Sea Shepherd is correct and that Japan is whaling under the disguise of scientific research. The factory ship is a research fleet mother ship, chaser ships were sighting/sampling vessels, missed harpoon shots were sampling errors, whale meat was considered by product of research, and Japan was conducting scientific research (Darby, 2008). However at the end of each year Japan brought some of the results of the program back to the IWC for the scientists to discuss; for Japan, marine resources were to be used and whales were a part of that resource (Darby, 2008).

*Christianity and Whaling*

In the Bible, there is no direct reference to the consuming of whale however there is a list of animals given by God that are suitable for consumption. The list of clean and unclean animals is stated twice in the Old Testament. Leviticus 11 describes the clean and unclean food. Leviticus 11:3 states “You may eat any animal that has a split hoof completely divided and that chews the cud.” (Holy Bible, New International Version, 1996). Leviticus 11:9 states “Of all the creatures living in the water of the seas and the streams, you may eat any that have fins and scales” (Holy Bible, New International Version, 1996). Deuteronomy 14:6 states “you may eat any animal that has a split hoof divided in two and that chews the cud” and Deuteronomy 14:9 states “Of all creatures living in the water, you may eat any that has fins and scales” (Holy Bible, New International Version, 1996).

This corresponds to the Jewish belief and practice of kosher. The word "kosher," however, is Hebrew for "fit" or "appropriate" and describes the food that is suitable for a Jew to eat (My Jewish Learning - Exploring Judaism and Jewish Life). In the Torah, which corresponds to Leviticus 11, mammals are to have the split hoof and chew cud and animals of the sea are to have both fins and scales; shellfish are not kosher (My Jewish Learning - Exploring Judaism and Jewish Life).

Christians have been given a mandate by God in Genesis 2:15 to care for His creation: “The Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (Holy Bible, New International Version, 1996). The result is that whales are not kosher and they are unclean therefore they are not to be consumed as food; they are to be cared for according to instructions given to man by God.

*Conclusion*

Whales are an important resource to sustain and they are also a species to be protected. The Inuit and Eskimos depend on the sea for most of their food supply and whales are part of that food supply and the Faeroe Island of Denmark depend on pilots whales to help the community survive the winter months; these groups have hunted for hundreds of years through sustainable practices . In this sense the taking of whales for food to be enforced with a resourceful management policy similar to the policy of hunting large game. This ensures that whales of a certain age group and size are taken; older males and female whales who are passed their breeding age and have stopped reproducing are good candidates to be tagged and taken for the whale meat markets. The IWC needs to change its personal mandate to follow this new policy and to build up international support and enforcement. Japan needs to stop the lethal scientific whaling and adopt new methods for studying whales; the whale meat market can be continued through the IWC and the new policy. All future research on whales and other marine species should be implemented in accordance with the stewardship of God’s creation and Christians and scientists need to take a more active stand alongside conservation groups to continue to protect whale species to ensure their survival. There was a time where it was believe that the world would see the last whale be killed. Changes were made to ensure that would not happen; it is time to make changes again.

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