Whaling: A Resource to be Used or a Species to be Protected

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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 Eskimos of the north still maintain their traditional of taking few whales to feed their communities. Some nations, such as Japan and Norway still continued to hunt whales. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) was created for the through the International Convention for the Regulation of Whaling. The main duty of the IWC, according to the website, is to govern the conduct of whaling throughout the world, protect certain species, set limits on whale catches, and designate areas as sanctuaries. However there are many loopholes in the IWC policies have been found and exploited by whaling nations such as Japan. Japan uses lethal scientific whaling to feed the whale meat market in Japan; lethal research means the whale is killed in the name of science. In response, radical environmental groups have taken a stand against these whaling nations. The Sea Shepherd Conservation Society, lead by Paul Watson have used “eco terrorism” to harass the Japanese whaling fleet each year in the Southern Ocean Whale Sanctuary off the coast of Antarctica. The Sea Shepherd uses cameras to document their work as they try to slow the progress of the Japanese whalers with bottles of rotten butter and methyl cellulose, a substance that becomes slippery when in contact with water. The Sea Shepherd will also ram into the Japanese whaling ships to give a whale a chance to escape the crosshairs of the harpooner’s gun. The fight between whaling nations and non-whaling nations has moved from the halls of the IWC to the oceans of Antarctica and has caused political stress between Australia and Japan. From a Christian viewpoint, there are verses that can help us understand our place within this fight for the right to whale. In Leviticus 11: 9-12 it says that of the creatures of the seas and streams, those that have fins and scales are to be eaten; those that do not have fins and scales are to be detested and the meat not must be eaten. Jewish dietary laws tie into this verse; kashrut dictates which animals are to be eaten and slaughter. Fish are to have fins and scales; shellfish are not kosher as they are considered to be bottom dwellers. Mammals are to have split hooves and chew their cud. Therefore, whales are not kosher and should not be consumed according to Jewish dietary laws. Stewardship of God’s creation is another consideration for Christians in this argument. Christians are to have dominion and care for God’s creation as stated in Genesis 2:15 where God puts Adam in the Garden of Eden to work and to care for it. From the point of view of Christianity, whales are not to be killed and consumed.

**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.**

References:

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