

- 6 Fiona Bowie, *Hildegard of Bingen: An Anthology* (London, 1990) p 12.
- 7 Quoted in McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*, p 122.
- 8 See McDonnell, *Beguines and Beghards*. p 445.
- 9 E. McLaughlin, 'Women, Power and the Pursuit of Holiness' in ed. R. Ruether and E. McLaughlin *Women of Spirit: Female Leadership in the Jewish and Christian Tradition* p 102.
- 10 Jacques de Vitry, 'Life of Mary of Oignies' quoted in ed. E.A. Petroff *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature* (Oxford, 1986) p. 7.
- 11 Quoted in Shulamit Shahar, *The Fourth Estate: a History of Women in the Middle Ages* (London and New York, 1990) p 59.
- 12 Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, pp 161 ff.
- 13 *Causae et Curae* 49, 29, quoted in Bowie and Davies p 29.
- 14 Frances Gies and Joseph Gies, *Women in the Middle Ages: The Lives of Real Women in a Vibrant Age of Transition* (New York, 1980) pp 51–52.
- 15 Aristotle, On the Generation of Animals quoted in Gies and Gies p. 50.
- 16 Summa Theologiae Ia Q 92 ad i.
- 17 D Jacquart and C Thomasset, *Sexuality and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (Polity Press, 1988) pp. 74–75.
- 18 quoted in Jane Barr, 'The Influence of Saint Jerome on Medieval Attitudes to Women', in ed. J Martin Soskice *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition* (London, 1990) pp. 89–102.
- 19 Gies and Gies, *Women in the Middle Ages*, p. 46.
- 20 Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp 244–45.

## Do Whales have Souls?

David Albert Jones OP

Do whales have souls and if so what follows? How would Catholic theology have to change if it was discovered that whales were as rational as you or I? If whales have souls can they become Catholics?

For a traditional Catholic, to have a soul, in latin *anima*, is to be animate, to be alive. Having a soul is having a certain form, a certain organisation such that one can move oneself. One part moves another so that the whole moves itself. This self-moving quality, shown in the processes of nutrition, growth and reproduction, is common to all living things. To be alive is to have a soul. St. Thomas Aquinas would affirm that all living things from cabbages to whales, so long as they were

alive, were so in virtue of a soul.

This broadly speaking, is the scriptural view, though it is often obscured by translation. In *Genesis* 1:20 God says, 'Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures'. In *Genesis* 2:7 God breathes into the nostrils of the man so that he becomes a 'living being'. In both cases the word *nephesh* is used which in other places we would translate soul. So the waters brought forth swarms of living souls, and Adam became a living soul. Plants are a bit of a borderline case, for though clearly alive they are not very lively. However, with this small qualification, hebrew Old Testament, greek New Testament, and latin scholastic theology would agree. To have a soul is to be alive. When we ask of something, 'does it have a soul?', we mean 'is it full of life?'

There are many different sorts of living thing, many different kinds. Each reproduces according to its kind and flourishes in its own way.

'The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its own kind. And God saw that it was good.' *Genesis* 1:12.

So God created the great whales and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. *Genesis* 1:21

And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good *Genesis*.1:25

The Scriptures show us a natural world created by God, of many different kinds, different plants, fish, birds and creeping things. Each kind of life has its own form and its home in a certain environment sea, sky or land. Each has its own place and its own needs, yet all are provided for by God.

Thou makest springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow in between the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild asses quench their thirst. *Psalm* 104: 10 & 11

Thou makest darkness, and it is night when all the beasts of the forest creep forth. The young lions roar for their prey seeking their food from God.' *Psalm* 104:20 & 21

He gives the beasts their food, and to the young ravens which cry. *Psalm 147:9*

Again,

Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. *Matthew 6:26*

God is the creator of all who sustains the life of all things. He wishes all things to flourish according to their kind, and delights in what he has created.

For thou lovest all things that exist, and hast loathing for none of the things which thou hast made, for thou wouldst not have made anything if thou hadst hated it. How would anything have endured if thou hadst not willed it? Or how would anything not called forth by thee have been preserved?

Thou sparest all things, for they are thine, O Lord who lovest the living. *Wisdom 11:24–26*

So all things created by God are meant to flourish and enjoy their life, to show forth the goodness of God. Among these living creatures strange and diverse are the graceful giants of the sea, our mammalian relatives, the whales. In their swimming and eating, their mating and rearing young, their play and song, they glorify their creator. Their praise is just their joy, their natural enjoyment of the gift of their own lives. This is their gratitude for life, their living of it.

Yet of course we cannot stop there for we are very familiar with another account. For a rational creature there is not only the possibility of natural gift and natural gratitude, but also of communication. If a soul can know and love, can talk as well as desire, then it can talk about God. So rational animals can be grateful not just in enjoying God's gifts but in saying thank you.

The ritual of saying thank you, by giving some portion back to God, is a basic expression of this gratitude. In rational animals then, gratitude is not just expressed by the enjoyment of life but in tokens, in offerings and oblation.

Rational animals think in symbols and learning to think involves catching on to the use of these symbols in the games and rituals of their elders. Learning is natural and necessary and so a desire to communicate

must be inborn to drive this development.

It is natural then that rational animals should have a desire to communicate and that this should extend even to God. So there is an attempt to make these token offerings not only tokens of gratitude, but of invocation, requests not merely for some gift or other from God, but for the presence of God, for an oracle from God. Even in the most degenerate bargaining by which priests endeavour to bribe God with choice morsels, there is underlying a desire to communicate, to be on speaking terms.

The revelation in the hebrew scriptures is significant in presenting a covenant, a promise which comes from God. The initiative in the stories of the Old Testament is always with God. He is not bribed into coming out to play. Rather the covenant is initially offered by God, and through the prophets he is constantly calling the people back to that relationship.

The revelation of the New Testament, the gospel of Jesus Christ, is the fulfilling of this Divine invitation to communicate. The Word of God who is God himself, becomes man to share a new way of communicating, a sharing of the Divine Wisdom and the Divine Life.

The notion of revelation is obviously only applicable to rational animals. We receive the grace of Christ, the grace of charity from God primarily because of the generosity of God. However, we are able to receive this grace because of what we are by nature, because we can desire to communicate with God.

It is difficult to define rationality, and it is difficult to explain the exact relationship of human language to that of other animals. Yet it should be clear from our knowledge of, say, birdsong that it is not the sort of language in which we could talk about God. Birds are intelligent as cabbages are not. They can make plans and change them. They have emotions which they express and they signal to other birds to warn of danger or to defend their territory, but they do not describe or discuss their lives. Bees also signal by their dances where flowers are to be found. However, the narrow and fixed range of this 'language' clearly differentiates it from the language of a rational animal.

If whales were rational animals the languages that they use would have the range and subtlety of human languages, far removed from the signalling codes of birds and insects. How can we tell if they are rational? Wittgenstein famously remarked 'If a lion could talk, we could not understand him.' (*Philosophical Investigations*, II xi) Our languages are based on the sort of lives we lead. Lions have no hands, no tools, no clothes, they eat no vegetables, they must hunt to live. If they talked to each other the basis of their language would be a life we did not share. We could not understand their actions. We could not learn their

language. This train of thought becomes implausible as soon as we realise how much we do have in common with lions, how much we do understand their actions. Some things we do share with them, eating (even meat), sleep (and so tiredness), hunger and cold, sight, hearing, aches and pains, risks and dangers. What we know about lions now, what we do understand of their behaviour suggests that if they could talk, we could understand, as it were, where they were coming from.

On the other side one might press the point made by the philosopher Donald Davidson in his 'Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation'. If there was no possibility of any translation between languages, if we could not understand anything of a different language, how could we know that it was a language of a discursive rational kind?

Whale song is complex and haunting and whales have big brains. Is this enough to demonstrate that when they sing they are saying something? Surely to know that we must know what they are saying. There are many clever birds which can imitate the human voice, but they cannot learn human language. The quality of their voice does not demonstrate the level of their language. As for whales having big brains, who is there who knows enough of the relation of mind and brain to look at a brain and say, 'Oh this is a French speaker'? We will not understand whalesong by looking at their brains. If we understand it at all, it will be by listening to its variations and looking at their behaviour, especially the way they educate their young.

No doubt such an alien world, of a great mammal in the midst of the ocean would produce many concepts very difficult for us. Yet if whales are rational, then we will be able to talk with them, agree with them and disagree with them. This is an empirical question; only by looking can we find out.

If we could discuss our lives with whales, could we preach the gospel to them? Clearly not, for Christian revelation is literally anthropomorphic. The revelation of God to us, which is the salvaging of our bad stock and our dismal history, comes by Jesus Christ, God become man. The message of hope which comes to us is a human answer to a human mess. The sacraments which Jesus gave to us, by which he is among us, are transformed human signs; cleansing, anointed, feasting, offering. For an animal innocent of our history and disconnected from our common inheritance, there could be no Christian hope. As it is we have evidence neither from revelation nor from science of any other spiritual animals. Our faith gives us no right to expect them, but teaches that if there are any other forms of rational animal, God will provide for them, as he provided for us in Jesus Christ.

Just as animals, whales are created by God and loved by him. Their

life is his gift. In the world to come, the whole creation has a part. What this means for whales we cannot say, though we may be permitted to hope that, as beautiful as they are, and as such, an inspiration to us, they will not be excluded from having some share in that world.

Why is it that people want so much for whalesong to be rational, for them to be saying things to one another? Partly, perhaps, it is a cosmic loneliness caused by the departure of the angels. When people no longer believe in a heavenly host, dancing before the throne of God, they look around for other hosts. Even if there are many people in this world, we are but one species on one small planet. Without angels for company, people scan the skies for alien communications, and in the seas scrutinize the clicks of dolphins and the songs of whales, all in the hope of finding fellow travellers, other spirits.

Partly people want whalesong to be rational because they cannot value animal life in itself. Animal life is only valued when it is useful or emotionally supportive to us. One result of the flight to the cities in western countries is that people never see working animals or farm animals. They only see animals as pets, taken off the land and put in a house. Such animals provide emotional comfort to the lonely and entertainment for children. Farmers may have pets, often the working dog is also the family pet, but their primary relation to animals is as livestock reared for milk, wool or meat. Pets are little friends. No one eats a pet. Yet not all animals are pets. Some are livestock, bred to eat. Some other animals kill our livestock or eat our crops. These are vermin to us, rats, rabbits, foxes. In all these ways we use and abuse animals; as pets, as livestock, as vermin. Yet most animals are not pets or potential pets, or livestock or potential livestock, or vermin but 'wildlife'.

The naturalist or environmentalist is like the ancient Psalmist who can see the wild beasts as valuable in themselves, as creatures worshipping God by being themselves. It is not by having votive masses or funerals for our pets that we respect the value of animal life. This is just a charade. It is by respecting natural animals in their natural habitats, by finding ways of coexisting with other species and preserving habitats and taking delight in their flourishing that we respect their value. Cruelty to pets is common and in some places it is cruel just to keep a pet. Many farming practices are questionable in their treatment of animals, particularly pigs, calves and chickens. Yet to respect the song of the spheres, the song of creation, the most urgent question is the preservation of habitat. In England this means wetland and hedgerows. Internationally it means forest and tundra.

Perhaps also people are captivated by the songs of whales because they themselves have forgotten how to dance and sing. (This was

already happening when Fr Vincent McNabb OP wrote 'The Decay of Dancing' in his *The Church and the Land*.) Though English people listen to music, rarely do they sing to one another. They know no ballads of love or political struggle. Whereas there are carnivals in the Americas and ceilidhs in Scotland and Ireland, the English have altogether lost a popular tradition of dancing. There are discos and nightclubs but these are not for social celebrations. The nearest the English get to a social dance is the Conga at the office party or on a Spanish holiday! Having become so graceless how can we but be charmed by these graceful giants?

Being so charmed as we should be, perhaps we could also reflect on our Christian practice. Have we perhaps confused talk with communication so as to be left with a wordy religion which does not touch us as it might? In our talk and our art, do we think too much of man alone, rather than men and women surrounded by angels and in the midst of a diverse creation? Have we become embarrassed by procession or ritual? Singing is not an extra to be tacked on, interrupting the real business of our liturgy. The liturgy is to be sung, that is its form.

We do not need a forced jolliness, or to struggle to be spontaneous at each gathering. We do not need fixed grins or loud choruses. If we are to communicate with one another before God, we need rather to rediscover a sensitivity to movement and a form to our song. Ease and grace do not come by acts of the will but by familiar and graceful forms. So much could we learn from the great whales.

What then of whales as they are, not as shown to be rational but merely gentle, beautiful and sensitive? If we are Christians, we must take the Psalms seriously. We must take seriously that the flourishing of different species in their different habitats constitutes a song of glory to their creator. This must especially be true of whales. Whatever the meaning of their songs in their lives, we cannot but perceive the spectacle of these creatures. Who can stop and view them and not wonder at them?

St Basil remarks, 'Some are terrible and great so as to take our idleness to school. 'God created the great whales' Scripture gives them the name great not because they are greater than a shrimp or a sprat, but because the size of their bodies equals that of great hills. Thus when they swim on the surface of the waters, one often sees them appear like islands, but these monstrous creatures do not frequent our shores and coasts; they inhabit the Atlantic Ocean. Such are these animals, created to strike us with terror and awe.'

It would be a great evil to hunt these creatures to extinction. Extinction of species is the way of things. As animals are born and die,

so new species emerge and later become extinct. However, new varieties emerge slowly, perhaps over hundreds of thousands of years, and a hundred thousand years is a long time in politics. For practical purposes, with large animals of long lifespan, the choice is only to conserve or destroy. To unthinkingly destroy species is vandalism. It assumes that they have no value except the price we put on them and the use we put them to. There are crude practical dangers in destroying plant and animal species. What trouble do we store up for ourselves in the future? What have we lost that we might have need of? More significantly there must be a respect for the fact of nature, for species as they are, as created by God. By their enjoyment of their own lives they show gratitude to their creator, they sing the song of creation. By our pollution and profane destruction we show our ingratitude. In our forgetfulness of nature, we forget our own nature, the earth from which we were formed. God did not create whales so that we might destroy them.

All life is created and sustained by God, and he desires all living things to flourish according to their nature. So the song of the whales, whatever it means, is a song of glory to God by being an expression of the joy of the creature. For human beings, for the stock of Adam and Eve, despite our ingratitude, God has given not just the possibility of flourishing according to our nature, but he has stooped down to speak his Word to us.

## Over the Ashes

Gerard Loughlin

Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida—these names can be made to evoke a certain history of thought, one that tells the rise and fall of foundationalist modernity. It is a history written as obituary: the death of God and the death of Man. The condition of the *postmodern* person is then like one living among a heap of rubble and ashes, wondering what 'comes after'.<sup>1</sup> But on looking up, such a postmodern may yet see hovering spirits.<sup>2</sup>

A couple of years ago, in the summer of 1990, the themes of such a