

Responses

Animals — the need for a new Catholicism (contd): see May 1989 (pp. 245—8), January (p. 42).

Adrian Edwards' negative response to my May 1989 article on animal rights contains a number of points though little in the way of argument. I shall for the sake of convenience take them in the order in which they are made.

First, it is good to see that Fr. Edwards is 'pro-*Humanae Vitae*', given that there is a good case for its being infallible teaching according to the ordinary magisterium of the Church (see recent work by Finnis et al., especially the forthcoming book *The Teaching of Humanae Vitae: A Defense*. Being pro-*Humanae-Vitae*' is hardly an act of supererogation deserving of a round of applause.

Secondly, I said nothing in my article to indicate a 'naive' belief that papal documents would inevitably have a profound impact on Catholics; as far as documents on ethics are concerned, I think I am fairly realistic about this. But fortunately there is more to Church teaching than the issuing of documents: there is pastoral action upon them, at least when the clergy believes what it is taught (which, in the last 25 years, it sadly does not as much as it should). In any case, it is strange to think that the magisterium should only formulate teaching on those issues in respect of which it believes it is likely to be obeyed. So for *Animalis Vitae* as for *Humanae Vitae*. I cannot see how a sound and consistent formulation of teaching in respect of the lives of animals would be speciesist in any objectionable sense ('speciesism' is in fact an unfortunate term covering a multitude of ambiguities, and I would prefer to keep it out of the debate).

Thirdly, I have fully thought out what I mean by 'a new Catholicism': if proper respect for the rights of God's creatures has always been part of Church teaching but been buried and forgotten, its exhumation will have far-reaching effects on the visible profile of Church doctrine; if it is as yet untaught, then it must be *added* to the deposit of doctrine, and this will involve changes to the underlying Aristotelian and scholastic philosophy of the Church, which has always been no more than a dispensable aid to the mind of the Church in its perception of the truth. One can argue at length about the 'newness' of the Catholic teaching that would result—suffice it to say that an extension of the sphere of moral concern would certainly do greater justice to the etymology of 'Catholicism'.

Fourthly, Singer's approach is, I believe, nullified by a recognition of rights, which is why he and his utilitarian colleagues are consistently hostile to 'rights talk'. The devaluation of human rights *simply does not follow* from the recognition of animal rights (see the work of Tom Regan, especially *The Case For Animal Rights* p. 380). For example, faced with the choice, in a no-cost Good Samaritan situation, between saving a drowning human and a drowning pig, I should say save the former. But does this mean that I can take the pig and torture it with toxic drugs to save a human's life?

Finally, Fr. Edwards' 'moderate animal rights position' is very moderate indeed, almost homeopathic in its diluteness. He seems to be saying that animals have the right to respect unless and until we choose not to respect them—a rather impotent right is ever there was one. Such moral approbation and reprobation is the ancient sop offered by those who want to have their steak and stroke it too. I'm not sure what 'violation of the common heritage of life' amounts to exactly, but if it is not *quite* the same as saying that crimes against animals degrade us humans, it seems to come awfully close. As Fr Basil Wrighton has written, it then becomes more a matter of temperance than of justice, such sins being classed as no more than venial.

As for the 'history argument', Fr. Edwards, in a roundabout way, wishes to postulate a kind of contract between us and the rest of God's creatures, placing on us just a few manageable obligations (perhaps not to kick the dog without just cause), along with the right to rescind whenever it suits us. A fine contract that, when one of the parties is mute and the other rules the planet with an iron fist—what would contract lawyers say about it as a paradigmatic case of unequal bargaining power?

In short, the 'rights' Fr. Edwards would ascribe to nonhuman animals are not worth a candle, and mask a position which is no more than utilitarianism in its Sunday best.

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The story of Mary — Luke's version: Deborah F. Middleton's December article (pp. 555—564)

Whilst not wishing to disagree with the main body of her exegesis, I feel Deborah Middleton leaves us with more difficulties than she solves. Firstly, the contrast she makes between Matthew's version of the infancy narrative and Luke's version involves some problematic assumptions. In Matthew, she tells us, 'Mary has no individual characteristics, no choice in her pregnancy ... Mary is a mute character, a passive victim of circumstances. She is certainly not an individual in charge of her own destiny' (p. 557). How does she arrive at these conclusions? It is generally accepted by commentators these days that neither Matthew nor Luke are writing history as we generally understand it but using O.T. stories in which to show Jesus as God's son and our Saviour, and that his birth is miraculous. Neither Luke nor Matthew is claiming that the conception of Jesus by Mary took place literally as we have it. This means that *both* the evangelists were theologising, and writing from entirely different perspectives.

Deborah Middleton is, of course, correct to point out that Matthew's story is about Joseph, and it is surely here rather than in Luke we can see Joseph's belief in God as placing him in the line of the Patriarchs (since, like

Abraham, Joseph believes God and it is accounted to him as righteousness). We need not assume from this that Matthew's Mary did not consent to her pregnancy; simply that we don't know the circumstances of how and when; the important point for Matthew is, surely, that Emmanuel is accepted by a believing Israel personified by Joseph. To assume from this that in Matthew Mary is intended to be a passive victim of circumstances is entirely gratuitous.

More problematic still is Middleton's understanding of Luke. According to her, in Luke when Mary gave her consent to the incarnation 'Be it done to me according to your word' God becomes subject to a woman's decision (p. 501). I wonder what she means by this? Let me put the question more directly: supposing Mary had refused, would the incarnation not have taken place? Can God be dependent on any of his creatures, even Mary? We have to assume that if Mary made a free decision then she could have refused, which brings us to the quite crucial question of her freedom, a freedom which enables her to accept her role as representative of the human race (which Deborah Middleton quite rightly tells us that she is). This makes her virginity and her immaculate nature not of secondary but of quite primary importance, because we have to understand real freedom in the N.T. as the possibility of doing God's will with a special integrity and unclouded mind. Mary agreed to the incarnation because she was truly free and only if she was unfree could she have refused. Freedom in the N.T. is a freedom of the Spirit, which offers the possibility of right choice, and in Mary this choice was possible and free because her world was God's world and because, as representing the consent of the human race, she did this not simply as a woman, 'pointing to gender' as Middleton would have it, but as a graced human being fulfilling the role of motherhood which properly belongs to women.

Finally, Deborah Middleton tells us that in Luke we find a woman 'who is not only in charge of her own destiny, which is in itself a revolutionary concept for the first century, but also the destiny of humanity' (p. 563). This is an extravagant claim very much in the spirit of a rhetorical hermeneutic. Not even Mary was 'in charge' of her own destiny, never mind the destiny and salvation of humanity. This claim has a sort of existentialist ring about it (or perhaps a mildly neo-pelagian ring?) and is marred with the kind of unfreedom that a refusal by Mary would have indicated. If, as Deborah Middleton suggests, Mary is the foremost disciple because she heard the word of God and kept it (cf. pp. 561, 562f.), it is also because she lost her life in order to save it—and that precludes her from being in charge of anything, even of her own life. And the mystery is that this is where real freedom lies.

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