

Animal Rights/Anti-Hunting Questions and Answers.

By Rev. Joe Classen

From time to time I receive emails and letters from (usually) well intentioned individuals who express great concern for God's creation and creatures, and who passionately question the ethics of such pursuits as hunting and fishing. In the following pages I will thoroughly address the top ten questions that deal with the subjects of "animal rights" and matters of anti-hunting philosophy.

Question #1.

Hunters (and fisherman) have well rehearsed arguments to support their activities, but betray their defensive logic with their actions, most especially, by proudly displaying the "trophies" of the hunt with photographs or taxidermy work. Doesn't this clearly show that hunting and fishing are primarily egocentric activities that satisfy a desire for competition, dominance or a pleasure in capturing and/or killing?

Answer #1.

Indeed, the counter arguments that hunters and fisherman offer when their actions in the woods and on the waters are criticized and questioned may seem rehearsed. This is because, ultimately, we get our information from many of the same sources, that is, from enormous amounts of scientifically verifiably, empirical data that has been gathered throughout decades of research done by wildlife biologists, conservationists, natural resource experts and other professionals whose primary goal is to produce objective data that can then be applied to managing our renewable resources, which includes wildlife and their habitat. These scientific and academic disciplines have all noted the vital role that properly applied methods of hunting and fishing play in the overall balance and health of the natural world. And again, most importantly, they have done so in an objective manner, that is, truth based on fact, not misconceptions based on emotions and personal agendas.

In regard to hunting and fishing being an egocentric activity rooted in competition, dominance and bloodlust...as “proven” by displaying or photographing a “trophy” animal or fish, here again, this is purely a subjective notion based on misunderstanding and stereotypes. Those opposed to hunting/fishing often only focus on what they see as the end result...a dead animal. What they don’t see is the hours upon hours that one spends preparing for a hunt, the diligent practice of a variety of skills, the careful study of nature, the backbreaking labor, the hours of research and the many other factors that are all included in making a hunt successful. What is also overlooked or ignored is that quite often, out of immeasurable expanses of time, very few, if any animals, are “harvested” (killed and eaten) by a hunter at all. For example, it took me ten years to harvest my first turkey and three years to harvest my first deer. If hunting was primarily an egotistical competition of bloodlust and self indulgence, the hunter would certainly be the loser the vast majority of the time.

A wildlife mount or photograph with a harvested animal/fish is simply a reminder of the overall experience and a tribute to the magnificence of the creature. It is a way to honor one’s food, the land that produced it, and the work it took to harvest it, for a lifetime.

Using personal experience again as an example, if one would look at the entire photo album of one of my hunting or fishing adventures, he/she would find that the vast majority of pictures are of the stunning beauty of nature, the fellowship of friends and the disciplined work behind it all. Such adventures become unforgettable, life-long treasures and an opportunity to take a front row seat to the wildest, most wonderful places on earth. And yes, make no mistake, if one can ultimately fill the freezer along the way...it is all the more reason to graciously thank the Lord and to share and immortalize the experience with photographs or taxidermy artwork.

Question #2.

Do you really believe that God is honored and feels good about having any of His animals suffer and die? God’s creation and heavenly intent clearly indicate

otherwise. All suffering and killing is part of this fallen world, which we are to rise above. The only one who is honored by bloodshed is Satan!

Answer #2.

Unfortunately, we cannot go back in time and prevent the fall of man or reverse the damage that has been done. When the first human beings turned their backs on God by means of their disobedience, sin entered the world. As Sacred Scripture teaches us, “The wages of sin is death.” (Romans 6:23) Sin destroys all that is good. It destroys us individually and communally. It destroys us emotionally, physically and spiritually. All the destructive pain and suffering that our world dishes out, which all of creation experiences, is ultimately rooted in the aftermath of sin.

That being said, we must always strive to avoid and alleviate the sin in our lives as the top priority and to heal the wounds that the destruction of sin has caused. But at the same time, concerning our existence here on planet earth, we have to live in reality. An unfortunate, but necessary reality on planet Earth is that something must die (animal or plant) for something else to live. The truth is (as I often say) that unless one eats dirt or lives in a dirt hut, one is responsible for the killing and utilizing of other living things.

The objective, undeniable reality is that all God’s creatures kill and eat God’s creation...and most do so in horrific, savage, brutal ways! Most all of creation sustains itself by searching for (hunting), killing and eating once living (and feeling) forms of life. The majority of birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians, mammals and even insects eat other fish, birds, reptiles, amphibians, insects and mammals. The ones that do not (herbivores) become food for the others. In the grand scheme of things...very little of creation is purely vegetarian. I could go on and on with first-hand, barbaric descriptions of Mother Nature in action. Bloodshed indeed!!!! The truth is, if there was not one human being on earth, animals would still suffer terribly as a result of other animals struggling for survival, the wrath of Mother Nature and environmental patterns that limit food, water supply and habitat.

As I also often point out, even in the process of raising vegetables, literal truckloads of animals end up being killed. They are eradicated because of massive crop damage; they get run over in combines, chewed up in plows, etc. The hard to face truth, which is usually just flat-out ignorantly denied, is that radical vegetarians and “animal rights” supporters have just as much blood on their hands as anyone else who must eat once living things to stay alive.

We human beings are not intended to act like savage animals with no concern for ethical conduct. While animals kill and eat each other with no regard to the pain and suffering their prey feels, we are called to utilize and take life in respectful, humane ways. As strange as it sounds, when one kills, he/she must do so with kindness. And this is something that the vast majority of outdoorsman, farmers, and for that matter, the general public (by paying others to process their food) does.

Concerning the notion of God being honored by bloodshed...it was only by the shedding of His Son's blood that we are saved. Jesus Christ truly became the “Lamb of God slaughtered for our offenses” (Isaiah 53). While Jesus became the “Lamb of Sacrifice” for all humanity, He and His disciples (some who were fishermen) also participated in the slaughtering and eating of lamb during the celebration of the Passover meals which they shared together. In the New Testament there are 27 references of Jesus and the Passover! Not to mention, Jesus and His disciples also participated in the catching, killing and eating of fish. There are 38 references to this. In fact, there is also reference in Scripture of Jesus commanding Peter to catch a fish with a hook, and not even for the purpose of food! (Mathew 17:27) Along with that we see in Genesis 3:21 that God the Father used animal skins to cloth Adam and Eve!

The bottom line is that we see all throughout Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition (from which the scriptures have come) that God Himself, in the person of the Father and the Son (Jesus Christ) respectfully, graciously harvested (killed, ate and used) His own creatures and shared them with others for nourishment and to fulfill man's needs.

Question #3.

Doesn't the Bible teach us that both humans and animals are living beings or souls (neh-fesh khah-yaw), and that both were to eat plants, because only living beings are sentient and can feel pain; while plants cannot? So why do hunters/fishermen deny or discount the fact that they are inflicting pain, suffering, and death?

Answer #3.

Indeed, in one sense, (as Scripture teaches and the Hebrew word implies) plants and animals are similar. They both are "living things" which were created by the "breath of God." However, as Sacred Scripture also clearly points out, mankind is the steward of creation, was given dominion over it all and has the responsibility to use (certainly not abuse) all of creation in order to sustain him/herself. Most importantly, while animals have a God-given "life force," they are not made in the "image and likeness of God" as humans are. (Genesis 1:26-27)

A very dangerous area that the "animal rights" philosophy promotes is the idea or concept that animals are equal to human beings and that the same moral codes apply. This is absolutely not what the Catholic Church or any orthodox Jewish or Christian community teaches. To do so is complete heresy. There are no moral standards or ethical codes among animals. The law of the jungle is kill or be killed...literally! Animals live as predator or prey...searching for food...or becoming the food of another. By animal rights logic, every wild creature that savagely and brutally kills another (which is certainly not always done for the purpose of food) should be captured, put on trial and executed for the crime of murder. Ridiculous! Again, certainly, animals, and all lesser forms of life, deserve our respect and care. But, they are also intended for our proper/legitimate use....and eating them is, as the Church teaches and Jesus (God) demonstrated...a proper use.

The Catholic Church's teaching on these matters (based on both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition) sums it up very well...

“The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity. Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man’s dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation.

Animals are God's creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless Him and give Him glory. Thus men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals.

God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom He created in His own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives.

It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly. It is likewise unworthy to spend money on them that should as a priority go to the relief of human misery. One can love animals; but one should not direct to them the affection due only to persons.” CCC-2415-2418

This teaching sums up perfectly the roles that proper conservation and stewardship play in our world and also the attitude of respect, concern and care that mankind owes all of creation. These are principles that any serious, ethical outdoorsman or woman live by. But at the same time, this teaching stresses the reality and necessity of using creation for legitimate uses...food being at the top of the list.

Question #4.

Jesus' sacrifice on the cross was the final sacrifice that accomplished everything for our redemption and salvation. There is no need for further bloodshed. What is the need for killing?

Answer #4.

Correct. Jesus' sacrifice was that which ended all sacrifices. But the sacrifice of His blood applies to our salvation, that is, the atonement of our sins. It has absolutely nothing to do with no longer killing and eating things to sustain ourselves, as God Himself (Jesus) did while here on earth. On the merely human, biological level, our lives are sustained by the "sacrificing" (that is, killing and properly utilizing) other living things. Everything we use for our survival on earth (with few exceptions) comes as a result of killing and properly using something that was once alive. Thus, comes the vital importance of proper stewardship of the earth; to keep our natural, renewable resources constantly in a state of renewal.

Question #5.

In Genesis 1:29-30 we see that God created and gave plant foods for all creatures (including human beings) to eat. How do you reconcile this with killing and eating animals?

Answer #5.

Yes, we find in Sacred Scripture that it was, in fact, God's plan for all of creation to live in harmony and eat various forms of vegetation. It was not God's will for anything to suffer and die. As addressed in answer #2, it was sin that brought these unfortunate realities about that mankind has had to live with, and to try to make the best of ever since. However, after the fall of man took place, we hear God give Noah another very different command, "Every creature that is alive shall be yours to eat; I give them all to you as I did the green plants." (Gen 9:3) Following this passage are the scripture references for what became the guidelines for "clean and unclean" foods.

Later, in Acts 10:13-16, God also addresses this issue as Jesus declares all foods (including animals) as clean and worthy of eating, as we hear “Get up, Peter. Slaughter and eat.” At first, Peter objects, “Certainly not, sir, for never have I eaten anything profane and unclean.” But as we read, Jesus proclaims, “What God has made clean, you are not to call profane.”

There are many subjective interpretations of this passage out there, and while the main point of Acts 10:13-16 concerns of the observance of Jewish law and the Christian, an undeniable reality imbedded in this passage is the fact that Jesus declared all foods clean...thus declaring that Christians, or those who become Christian, are free from the confines of the law, and among other things, can now (with few exception) eat any kind of meat, since all are good and “clean” in the eyes of God. If Christians were still subject to the Old Covenant then animal sacrifices (sin offerings) would still be in place today. As we know, Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross was the sin offering that ended all others and established the New Covenant in His blood...thus, the Old is passed away.

Question #6.

Mankind does not need to hunt for food today as earlier generations and cultures did when food was needed. You certainly don’t have to search for food as the world’s animals do, at least any further than your local supermarket, and you can buy foods that don’t cause any pain and suffering to animals. So why still hunt and fish?

Answer #6.

As long as human beings roam the earth, we will need to eat. While it is possible for humans to remain fairly healthy from eating a purely vegetarian diet (with supplementation and nutritional manipulation) most credible scientists agree that humans are naturally designed to eat a balanced diet, including meat and animal products, for overall optimum health. While those who “hunt” at the market have no problem paying someone to kill food for them and completely remove themselves from the reality of the cycle of life and the food chain, we in the outdoors community prefer to know firsthand

where our food comes from, how it lived and how it died. We take personal accountability and responsibility for our food and the land that sustains and produced it. As a result, we gain a sacred respect for what we eat. As I mentioned earlier, nationwide, millions of animals die as a result of raising vegetables and other foods. In the grand scheme of things, responsible hunting and fishing is a far more ethical and humane way to live, which also instills a much more genuine, healthy relationship with the environment.

Question #7.

Isn't it true that many states are artificially keeping the deer populations high to gain income from hunters, and that the remaining populations could easily be kept in check by using immunocontraceptives?

Answer #7.

It is true that states gain revenue from hunters and fishermen. In Colorado, for example, there are an estimated 960 species of wildlife with approximately 50 of those being actively hunted. The income generated through hunting and fishing opportunities funds the majority of the conservation and wildlife management in the state, while at the same time, only 15 to 20 percent of Coloradoans actually hunt or fish. Similar principles can be found in most other states as well. It is because of the genuine care and concern for all things wild that hunters and fisherman gladly pick up the bulk of the bill when it comes to conservation efforts that ultimately support all areas of the environment, which all people (most who do not hunt and fish) enjoy. Don't forget, the creation of Federally protected lands, State Parks, etc., where originally created and implemented by outdoorsmen such as President Teddy Roosevelt who said, "A hunter must first be a nature lover."

That being said though, any state wildlife biologist would laugh hysterically at such a preposterous notion of deer populations artificially being kept sky high. The deer boom has cost massive amounts of money to control. Not to mention it is the cause of thousands of human injuries and deaths. How about their suffering? *The Association of*

Fish and Wildlife Agencies reported in a recent study that if hunting were stopped now, there would be an additional 50,000 human injuries as a result of a 218 percent increase in vehicle-deer collisions. States are begging folks to hunt so the state doesn't have to spend a fortune addressing these matters which far outweigh the funds generated by hunting.

For starters, loss of habitat is the number one cause of deer population increase. States that don't allow hunting in these areas often end up spending massive amounts of money to later hire "sharpshooters" to balance numbers. As a result, far more animals are killed by the state...not hunters... who would have kept both the cost down and the animals responsibly in check.

Concerning deer sterilization drugs...the USDA has reported that deer birth control methods costs between \$500 to \$1000 dollars per deer when it is all said and done.

Porcine zona pellucida (the only truly effective deer immunocontraceptive) is extremely difficult to administer effectively, often causing terrible suffering and death to the animal, but even more hypocritical...this drug is derived from the ovaries of slaughtered pigs! Killing one animal to thin out others?????

Question #8

Isn't it true that Jesus belonged to the Essenes (a Jewish sect) and was a vegetarian?

Answer #8.

Many animal rights organizations hold to the claim that Jesus was a vegetarian based on a highly arguable notion that Jesus belonged to the Essenes, a Jewish sect that is believed to have followed a (mostly) vegetarian diet and who rejected the practice of animals sacrifice as a part of their religious tradition and practice. There are very few (if any) reputable scripture scholars that support this argument. There are many specific details that the New Testament does not reveal about the life and times of Jesus, such as the exact characteristics of His diet, because it was of no importance to record them or pass them along. However, if Jesus truly wanted mankind to not respectfully harvest and eat

of His creation (including meat and fish), we can be good and sure He would have directly, specifically preached on the matter with the same forthrightness and unwavering authority that He did on other fundamental teachings of the gospel. But again, both Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition teach us otherwise. The “theology” used by the “vegetarian Jesus” supporters is based on coincidence, subjective fantasy, speculation, ignorance and creative, subjective interpretations of Sacred Scripture.

The Essenes were a secretive Jewish sect that practiced a rather ascetic lifestyle while dwelling in the Judean desert. The Essenes broke away from the purity of Judaism and left the mainstream culture behind. In the mindset of the Essene, both of these were thought to have become corrupt and unclean. Thus, they practiced an extreme understanding of the purity laws, all the while preparing and waiting for an apocalyptic war by means of which their enemies would be destroyed by the vengeful wrath of God. Jesus’ association with “unclean” lepers and His message of mercy and forgiveness would have put at Him at complete and total opposition to the mindset of the Essenes. Along with that, as a Jew, Jesus spoke on many occasions on the importance of keeping the law and that He did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it. (Matthew 5:17)

Some animal rights “theologians” speculate that John the Baptist was an Essene, and so, when he baptized Jesus, our Lord became both an Essene and a vegetarian by default. These, and similar arguments, are, as renowned scripture scholar and Dead Sea Scrolls expert Rev. Joseph Fitzmeyer states, “A lot of baloney!”

Just the idea that the Essenes were vegetarian is pure speculation, as it goes unmentioned in scripture as well as sources such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. As reputable scholars point out, the Essenes were rigorous purists, thus, while they may have rejected the ongoing practice of animal sacrifice (not out of compassion for animals, but rather out of disgust over Temple practices), they most likely still would have partaken in the Passover meal and the slaughtering and eating of the lamb, which is a cornerstone of Jewish religious practice.

Question #9

If you were a real man, you would go into the woods with nothing but your bare hands and then see what you can hunt. Wouldn't hunting in this manner put you on equal and fair footing with wildlife?

Answer #9

For starters, the senses of a wild animal are in most cases hundreds of times (literally) more powerful than a human's. Most animals are well aware of a human's presence in the woods, long, long before one ever has a clue they are there. It's because of this, and the fact that a wild animal knows the wilderness as intimately as one knows his/her living room, that a wild creature clearly has the upper hand at all times. It's only by means of man's superior intellect and polished skills that an animal (or a farm raised vegetable for that matter) ever makes it to the dinner table.

I must say though, I'm truly shocked that people who seem so concerned with animal welfare would even suggest the notion of going out into the wild, stalking an animal and then choking the life out of it in what is the most barbaric, extremely unethical and illegal method of hunting in the world!!! The reason a hunter practices diligently with a firearm or bow is to ensure a quick, humane, respectful end to that creature's life.

I for one certainly do not consider myself a "real man" because I'm a successful, avid outdoorsman. Such a notion is not only insulting, but ultimately, based on ridiculous stereotypes. While there are certainly unethical outdoors men and women out there who give us a bad name, the vast majority are not.

Question #10

Isn't "catch and release" fishing torturous to fish?

Answer #10

The vast majority of fly fisherman today use single, barb-less hooks and are extremely careful in catching, handling and releasing fish. In fact, most public trout waters now

require the use of such tackle. Bass and other stout fish with big, boney mouths filled with cartilage are oblivious to having a hook or two set in. These are the same creatures that devour other fish and in the process receive multiple puncture wounds (which heal fast) from the spinney fins of their prey. In either case, responsible fisherman take care in catching, handling and releasing a fish that is to be released so others can also enjoy that creature down the road.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, I truly wish those involved in “animal rights” were so passionate about the dignity and well-being of humans, especially the unborn. The vast majority of those in the animal rights movement that I’ve corresponded with aggressively promote things like the slaughtering of unborn human beings (abortion) yet cry bloody murder when someone kills a deer to feed his/her family. The major lack of moral priority continues to baffle me.

I’ve found that arguing over matters of animal rights, especially from objective scientific and scriptural disciplines is, for the most part, ultimately a waste of time. In many of my discussions with animal rights aficionados, sound scripture study, objective fact, biological principles and proven scientific data is flat out ignored and disregarded. Some “Christian” animal rights activists have even admitted to me, “Regardless of what Jesus or the disciples did in the Bible...we believe we should be doing differently.” I have to admit, when it’s all said and done, I’m absolutely stunned by the display of denial in the majority of the animal rights community. Remember good people, we do not live in a Disney movie.