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## In Behalf of Research: A Word on Vivisection

Catholic Physicians' Guilds

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# IN BEHALF OF RESEARCH:

## A Word on Vivisection

THE promotion of medical research and medical science could be greatly curtailed and seriously hampered if the voices of the anti-vivisectionists throughout the land are heard loudly enough in legislative halls. A number of organizations are working toward the outlawing of animal experiments.

Catholic medical colleges had asked the National Federation to give expression to the subject in its deliberations during the annual Executive Board meeting of the Guilds held this summer. The resolution that follows was prepared for publication:

### WHEREAS:

Currently there are various organizations working for legislation that would seriously restrict the use of animals in properly conducted medical research, claiming, among other things, that such use of animals is against Catholic teaching, therefore:

### BE IT RESOLVED

that the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds meeting this 16th day of June, 1963 in Atlantic City, New Jersey, recognizing that research is an essential element of medical progress, and that the use of animals is frequently an essential part of medical research, and that there is no moral ban against the use of animals in properly conducted research, go

on record of supporting the use of animals in such manner.

Charles G. Wilber, Ph.D., Dean of the Graduate School of Kent State University, Kent, Ohio has prepared a brochure entitled *The Catholic View of Vivisection*, published by the National Society for Medical Research, Rochester, Minnesota, from which we quote, with permission, portions to substantiate the convictions of those who would work toward the continued and proper use of animals in experiments to advance research in behalf of human kind:

To clarify the matter of the use of animals in experimentation, one should go to St. Thomas Aquinas whose views on fundamental matters of man's relation to his surroundings form the basis of Catholic philosophy. In discussing, in the *Summa Theologica*, the relationship of man to the animal world, St. Thomas points out that "The subjection of other animals to man is natural." He refers to Aristotle and points out that the great philosopher holds that "The hunting of wild animals is just and natural, because man thereby exercises a natural right."

St. Thomas Aquinas clearly approves the use of animals by man for his convenience and pleasure. He uses as an example the fact that "fowl are given by man as food to trained falcons." And he presents this example in

answer to the objection that all animals are not under the mastery of man.

It might also be pointed out that St. Thomas Aquinas clearly says that "Man needed animals in order to have an experimental knowledge of their natures." He reminds his readers that in Genesis God is pictured as leading animals to man so that he might give them names. This symbolism clearly indicates that man, as viewed in the Old Testament, controls and is master of animals. For, according to the ancient oriental idea, if one possessed the name of a thing, he controlled and was master of that thing.

Furthermore, the common teaching of authoritative Catholic sources has always been in favor of the use of animals for experimental research. In *A Catholic Dictionary* the brief article on vivisection points out that vivisection is "the dissection of an animal while still living, the better to study the phenomena of life: since the lower animals have no strict rights." It is emphasized that basic to all Catholic teaching on the relations of animals to man is the insistence that *animals have no rights*. The article goes on further to say that such dissection "is not immoral provided that torture is not inflicted for its own sake."

No respectable biologists or medical investigator is interested in torture for its own sake. In fact, every effort is made in efficient laboratories to avoid pain and torture in experimental animals because these disrupt the proper experimental conditions. Each investigator is in-

terested in searching for the truth and if the animal is stressed with undue pain, obviously the results of the experiment will be somewhat less than desirable. Whenever possible in respectable laboratories, anesthetics are used in experimental animals.

The Catholic Dictionary concludes its brief discussion of vivisection by pointing out unequivocally: "The valuable assistance given to physiology and pathology by the practice of vivisection completely outweighs the objections which are urged against it."

The Catholic Church places no obligation whatever on any Catholic to take interest in societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals. It is quite true that cruelty to animals is considered not in keeping with the dignity of man if this cruelty is wanton. However, if there is reason for it, then animals may be used in any way necessary for the welfare of man.

Cardinal Newman wrote against wanton cruelty and against excesses on the part of vivisectionists — especially on the part of those whose only motive for doing what they did to animals was curiosity. Cardinal Newman, the careful thinker that he was, would never have condemned vivisection when it is carried out with all reasonable safeguards against unnecessary pain and especially when the clear object in mind is the discovery of something truly of benefit to man and something which would alleviate untold human agony. During one of his lectures in the University of Ireland, he said:

We have no duty toward the brute creation. There is no relation of justice between them and us. Of course, we are bound not to treat them ill, for cruelty is in a sense against the Holy Law which our Maker has written in our hearts. But they can claim nothing at our hands; into our hands they are absolutely delivered. We may use them, we may destroy them at our pleasure, not our wanton pleasure, but still for our own ends, for our own benefit or satisfaction, provided we can give a rational account of what we do.

This is a clear and unequivocal expression of the views of one of the great Catholic intellectuals with respect to the use of animals by man. It is a point of view which the Catholic scientist and any scientist can accept without question.

It is important to emphasize that if the welfare of mankind can benefit by experimental procedures on living animals, then such procedures and experiments are lawful, ethical, and morally justified provided that reasonable measures are taken, by the use of appropriate anesthetics, to prevent unnecessary pain in the subject animals. There is no question that observations which are made on

the reactions of living animals lead to improved surgical operations and other manipulations on human beings which help man to avoid pain and to insure health. Various factors which contribute to disease and the successful treatment of these diseases have been discovered as a direct result of the study of living animals. If one will honestly face up to the results of animal experimentation, then from the Catholic point of view the inflicting of pain on lower animals is fully justified.

Fundamental Catholic teaching on the matter is quite clear. In every Catholic university and seminary in the world the principle is taught that animals have no moral rights in themselves and consequently there are no duties on man towards animals. We do have a duty toward God and toward our own human dignity to treat animals kindly and to spare them suffering which is wanton or unnecessary. But the welfare of humankind clearly and without question justifies as a necessary thing the minimum amount of unavoidable pain which is involved in the use of animals for man.