

Church Times 8 September 2006, p.13

The sacrifice of animals to save human lives

Dr Martin Henig

Sir, - The big debate in Oxford University over the past year has been concerned not with church matters but with the building of an "Animal House", to house and breed animals for medical research.

While, no doubt, many Christians will have personal views concerning the subject, it is unfortunate that the Church has not so far placed itself where it should be: in the very centre of a debate throughout the nation on what should be a pressing moral issue.

To assume automatically that because it is possible to experiment on animals, and because notional benefits may be obtained from such research (and profits for drug companies), it is therefore right to kill or cause excruciating pain to our fellow creatures, leads us into dangerous territory indeed.

Apart from the effect on animals, what harm does such research do to those who take part in, or sanction, such cruelty? As Christians, we have priorities in saving life, and yet we see human lives wasted by lack of food, lack of safe drinking water, lack of hygiene, and by war and terrorism throughout the world. We can save many human lives without a single new drug.

Moreover, in advancing medicine, there is much that can be done without causing suffering, and in the light of good Franciscan principles of reverence before the creation and the God who brought it into being. So often in our prayers of intercession, daily and on Sundays, I have the uneasy feeling that we do not see the world in its complexity. Let us, indeed, pray for ourselves and our fellow man, but let us pray also, as I try to do, for the creation that God saw as very good, and resolve to be good stewards of animals and plants in future.

If this leaves[sic..leads] us far beyond debating the morality of putting electrodes into the brains of kittens and monkeys, and into worrying about the slaughter of animals to indulge our appetites, then so it should.