

Government and Church inaction allows Animal Cruelty to thrive claims Oxford Theologian

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Government and Church inaction over animal welfare compounds animal cruelty, Professor Andrew Linzey, a theologian at Oxford University and the director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, will claim at a special RSPCA service for animals at Westminster Abbey on Sunday 2nd October.

Citing the failure of the Government to act on wild animals in circuses, plans for “mega-dairies”, and the decision to kill badgers without sufficient scientific evidence, he argues that the Government has failed to confront the “multi-headed hydra” of animal cruelty. “As one moves out, another moves in”, he says. “Having dismantled the worst aspects of factory farming, we now face the emergence of “mega dairies” in which up to eight thousand cows are to be kept permanently inside

factories devoid of natural light and pasture. Only a few days ago, we heard of plans for “mega-piggeries” to house no less than 30,000 pigs. We are turning animals into food machines.”

Professor Linzey claims that “The underbelly of cruelty to animals shows no sign of diminishing” since complaints of cruelty investigated by the RSPCA have risen year on year from 137,245 in 2007 to 159,686 in 2010. “Why is it that we cannot as a society see that animal cruelty, like cruelty to children, should not be tolerated?” he asks.

Andrew Linzey also castigates church indifference to animal cruelty. The churches “are nowhere in this debate. With a few honourable exceptions - and I mean a very few - English archbishops and bishops haven’t even addressed the issue in the past decade or more. Almost all church leaders, who are normally loquacious in lamenting regressive social policies, can’t even register cruelty as an issue. They talk airily of environmental responsibility, but, when it comes to confronting our specific duties to other sentient creatures, fall silent.”

The root problem, he says, is a failure of theology, especially the “idolatry” of thinking that God is only interested in the human species.

“Christians haven’t got much further than thinking that the whole world was made for us, with the result that animals are only seen in an instrumental way as objects, machines, tools, and commodities, rather than fellow creatures. To think that animals can be defined by what they do for us, or how they meet our needs, is profoundly un-theological.”

“The truth is that we are spiritually blind in our relations to other creatures, as blind as men have been to women, whites have been to blacks, and straights have been to gays. Political sluggishness and church indifference only compound the problem of animal cruelty.”

Professor Linzey concludes by arguing that “we worship a false God when we worship ourselves, or when we think only human beings matter to God, or when we think our power over animals is its own justification, or when we regard cruelty to any creature as a small, insignificant, matter, or, even worse, when we think God condones any infliction of suffering”.

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