

Call for National Animal Cruelty Offenders' Register by Oxford Theologian

Submitted by: Oxford Centre of Animal Ethics

Thursday, 27 September 2012

A call for a National Animal Cruelty Offenders' Register will be made by Professor Andrew Linzey (<http://http://www.oxfordanimaethics.com/who-we-are/director/>), a theologian at Oxford University and the director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics (<http://www.oxfordanimaethics.com>), in an address at St Albans Cathedral (<http://http://www.stalbanscathedral.org>) on Sunday 30 September.

The Animal Offenders' register is recommended, along with compulsory empathy training, as a "two stage approach based on Christian principles of repentance and compassion" in response to the many thousands of animal cruelty cases each year.

"For a long time, animal protectionists have been calling for stricter penalties for those convicted of animal abuse. And the usual measures, including fines and community orders, seem a pretty weak-kneed response to those who deliberately inflict cruelty. That is why some are now calling for automatic prison sentences for cruelty and long ones at that. But prison, it seems to me, is not the answer. We know that around 40% of prisoners reoffend and prison frequently dehumanises people. We have to find a way in which the seriousness of animal cruelty can be registered, offenders effectively treated, and animals saved from cruelty. This requires a radical rethink", argues Linzey.

"Compulsory empathy training for offenders would not be a soft option. Over a period of months, even years, people who are cruel would need to attend classes that require them to confront their own proclivities toward violence and learn to empathise with the suffering of animals."

"Animal protectionists should step up to the plate and embrace this opportunity to lead empathy training courses. They should help fund them, run them, and staff them with professionals. It is too easy just to condemn; animal protectionists need to invest in the change they want to see in the world."

"For those who cannot or will not undergo empathy training, or those who do not successfully complete the course, or those who reoffend, then their name needs to be placed on a national register. Those on the register would be forbidden from keeping an animal, or working with them. This register could be consulted by individuals and employers and it would become an offence to sell an animal to such a person or employ them in animal-related work."

Professor Linzey argues that the low priority given to animal cruelty in the criminal justice system is reflective of a much deeper blindness: "Our society hasn't yet appreciated what is at stake for human beings. Cruelty is not just a vice; it is a social vice. There is a well-established link between animal abuse and human violence supported by hundreds of psychological, medical, sociological, and statistical studies. A world in which animal cruelty goes unchecked is bound to be a less morally safe world for human beings."

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Notes to editors:

- This is an extract from a sermon to be preached by Professor Linzey at St Albans Cathedral on Sunday 30 September at 6.30pm. All are welcome to attend. Tickets are not required.
- The Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey is a Member of the Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford. He is Honorary Professor at the University of Winchester and Professor of Animal Ethics at the Graduate Theological Foundation, Indiana. He has written or edited 20 books, including *Animal Theology* (SCM Press/University of Illinois Press, 1994) and *Creatures of the Same God* (Winchester University Press/Lantern Books, 2007), and *Why Animal Suffering Matters* (Oxford University Press, 2009). He is also co-editor of the *Journal of Animal Ethics* published by the University of Illinois Press. He is the editor of *The Link between Animal Abuse and Human Violence* (Sussex Academic Press, 2009).
- The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, founded in 2006 by its director Professor Andrew Linzey, is an independent Centre with the aim of pioneering ethical perspectives on animals through academic research, teaching and publication. The Centre has more than 50 Fellows drawn from a variety of academic disciplines from throughout the world. For more information about the Centre and its Fellows, please see its website at www.oxfordanimaethics.com (<http://www.oxfordanimaethics.com>).
- The Centre is dedicated to the memory of the celebrated Catalan philosopher José Ferrater Mora. His prodigious scholarship is widely acclaimed, and the Centre honours his name because of his outstanding contribution to humanitarian thought, particularly in the area of animal ethics.