

**Cannon Office Building  
Washington, D.C.  
Religious Proclamation for  
Animal Compassion**

**Lao Tzu, Confucius, The Buddha, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad, Gandhi.**

**These are the names we know so well from the most respected faith traditions in the history of the world. Through their actions, major shifts took place in the way people understood their place in the universe.**

**Why are these people the most important that ever lived and how did they manage to change the very fabric of their cultures? I see two common threads among them. First, each of them was what we would term today, sociologists. They had an innate ability to survey the world around them and identify the outcast, the left out, the rejected, the underdog, the segregated, the portion of society that was being devalued by others in their place and time. Once identified, all of these religious leaders were then able to restore dignity to those who were being oppressed, even against seemingly insurmountable odds. To do so, each of them had to break through the worldview of the day, to create an entirely new way of understanding morality and ethics.**

**In my own lifetime, I have seen this happen two more times. When the world said that the tension and hatred between blacks and whites could never be broken in South Africa, Archbishop Desmond Tutu changed the very values of the nation to bring about healing and justice. In our own country, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. changed the way all of us relate to one another, bringing this country**

that much closer to the ideal of egalitarianism envisioned by the framers of this nation.

If we are going to make the world a better place to live today, I know of no better model than the one used by every one of those great religious leaders. So, let us start with that sociological question. Who is it that is being most abused by the power structures of our day? Who is it that we devalue the most in our culture?

Unfortunately, there remain many possible choices. But for me, there is nothing we devalue more than God's creation. Certainly it is the most vulnerable because animals and other parts of creation have no way to defend themselves from whatever we perpetrate upon them. We have taken what God continuously refers to as very good in the first book of my sacred text, and devalued it, turning God's creatures into objects for our personal use. Just as we have often segregated ourselves from other human beings causing their devaluation, we have segregated ourselves from every non-human species. All of us know exactly what this segregation from our fellow beings has created. We are on the verge of not only destroying all of God's creatures, but we are now beginning to realize, finally, that this is threatening humanity's existence too.

I would dearly love to tell you as an Episcopal priest that it is the secular world that has caused this broken relationship between ourselves and the rest of creation. But the truth of the matter is that this is our fault, the religious leaders of today's world. We have not interpreted our sacred texts for our present day

situation. We have not followed the example of our predecessors of identifying those most abused in our culture; and then taking the necessary steps to change the way of thinking that causes that abuse.

Why have we not responded when the pain and suffering we have perpetrated on animal populations is so obvious? From my own Christian tradition's perspective, my best guess is that it is an accident of history. When Christianity first came in contact with indigenous groups like the Celts and the Druids who saw nature as God, church leaders were apparently so fearful of pantheism that they began speaking of God only as transcendent, as totally separate from us. All those descriptions in our sacred text that describe God as being intimately with us were buried in favor of a God far away. This seems a bit absurd for a religion based on a God that became one of us. But that's what we did. So while Colossians says, "There is only one Christ - he is everything and he is in everything.", Christianity decided to reject this notion altogether. We would totally break our relationship with the animals and the rest of God's creation.

The time has now come to recapture the God of all creation. The time has come for us to identify the animals as the ones in our time that are being rejected, oppressed and segregated. Then we, like the religious leaders that have come before us, must be the impetus for creating a gigantic shift in our culture that convinces the world that we must be in relationship with our animals and all of God's creation again. We must change our worldview entirely. Animals, my

friends, are not a resource. They deserve to live in dignity and we are called by each of our faith traditions to bring that dignity to them.

This Religious Proclamation for Animal Compassion is, in my mind, the perfect first step in bringing this seismic change about. In forming it, we brought together leaders from faith traditions that have recently been polarized from one another. That, in itself is so critical in today's fragmented society. But even more importantly, this Proclamation focuses us on the task ahead.

Every age has a deep calling to bring about a wholly new worldview. This is the evangelism of our time. It is time for us to hear not just the cry of God's people, but to hear the cry of God's animals, of God's creation. Let us save the animals and each other by bringing this world back into relationship with all of God's creation. There is no more important thing any of us will ever do.