

From Pulpit to Protest: Christian Leaders Speak out Against Bullfighting

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Animal cruelty is an issue that transcends cultural, geographical, and religious boundaries. It is a moral issue that calls for a united response from people of all faiths and beliefs. Among the voices calling for an end to such cruelty is Father Terry Martin, a vegan Catholic priest from West Sussex, England. Father Martin has gained attention for his outspoken stance against bullfighting, a tradition he views as inherently cruel and incompatible with Christian values. His advocacy highlights the importance of Christian involvement in the fight against animal cruelty and underscores the potential benefits of working alongside secular groups to achieve common goals. This article also includes the voices of other UK vegan clergy who are speaking out against bullfighting, adding to the growing chorus of religious leaders demanding change.

Father Terry Martin's Crusade Against Bullfighting

Father Terry Martin has taken a firm stand against the tradition of bullfighting. His efforts have brought significant attention to the cruelty involved in this practice. Bullfighting, which is still popular in some parts of Spain and Latin America, involves prolonged torment and eventual killing of bulls in the name of sport and entertainment. Father Martin's campaign against this barbaric practice is rooted in his deep-seated belief in the sanctity of all God's creatures.

In a powerful advertisement for *The Tablet*, Father Martin teamed up with [People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals \(PETA\)](#) to denounce bullfighting. The ad, which features Father Martin's poignant message against the cruelty of the sport, is part of his [continued calls and efforts for Pope Francis to condemn bullfighting publicly](#). He believes that the Pope's condemnation could lead to a significant shift in public perception and policy regarding bullfighting, particularly in predominantly Catholic countries where the sport is still prevalent. Father Martin said:

As Christians, we are called to be stewards of all God's creation, and that includes treating animals with the compassion and respect they deserve. Bullfighting is a cruel practice that stands in stark contrast to our values of mercy and love. It is our duty to speak out against such cruelty and to work towards a world where all creatures are treated with dignity."

Christian Teachings and Animal Welfare

Christian teachings provide a strong foundation for advocating against animal cruelty. The Bible speaks of God's creation with reverence and commands humans to be stewards of the earth. Genesis 1:26-28 emphasises the role of humans as caretakers of God's creation, which includes all living creatures. This stewardship implies a responsibility to treat animals with kindness and compassion, rather than subjecting them to unnecessary suffering.

Father Martin's stance against bullfighting is deeply rooted in these biblical teachings. He argues that inflicting pain and death on animals for entertainment is a clear violation of the stewardship role entrusted

to humans by God. His advocacy is a call to Christians to reflect on their responsibilities and to act in accordance with the values of compassion and mercy that are central to the Christian faith. Father John Ryder, former Vicar at All Saints Parish Church, Godshill, echoes this sentiment:

God gave us dominion over animals. In this (as in all things) we should follow our Lord's example. He is our Lord, that is, he has dominion over us. Imagine if our Lord treated us as bulls are treated in Spain? As this is unthinkable, then so for a Christian is bullfighting, bull running, etc."

Father Edward Owen, Vicar of South Cardiff Ministry Area in the Diocese of Llandaff, adds,

If we believe God has love for all that he has created, then using the beauty of creation in a cruel way for entertainment or sport, is the ultimate denial of the love of God. Bullfighting is not only unpleasant, it is also very cruel and denies the image of God in his creation."

The Benefits of Christians Working with Secular Groups

One of the notable aspects of Father Martin's campaign is his collaboration with PETA, a secular animal rights organisation. This partnership exemplifies the benefits of Christians working with secular groups to oppose animal cruelty. By joining forces, they can amplify their message, reach a broader audience, and bring about more significant change.

Amplifying the Message

When faith and secular groups unite for a common cause, they combine their resources and platforms, thereby amplifying their message. Father Martin's collaboration with PETA has brought his message against bullfighting to a wider audience than it might have reached through church channels alone. The use of a well-known secular platform like PETA helps to bridge the gap between different segments of society, ensuring that the message of compassion and animal welfare resonates with a diverse group of people.

Bridging Divides

Collaborations between religious and secular organisations can help bridge divides and foster mutual understanding. These partnerships demonstrate that despite differing beliefs, there are shared values and common goals that can unite people. Father Martin's work with PETA highlights how shared concerns about animal cruelty can bring together individuals and groups from different backgrounds, promoting a sense of unity and collective responsibility. The Revd Dr Jan Goodair, Area Environment Champion for the Diocese of Leeds, captures this spirit perfectly:

Christ recognised the good in people who did not share his (Jewish) faith. Christians who advocate for animals should feel similarly confident and comfortable in working with secular groups who share our concerns and compassion: they are our allies. I regularly take part in street outreach on behalf of Viva!, a secular organisation. We are a very mixed bunch, drawn together in a common cause. When I talk about faith shaping my concern for animals, I generally find that Christianity goes up in people's estimation and that very fruitful conversations follow. I don't really think that there is a religious/secular divide but rather that we find God at work wherever we encounter love, so why not work together."

Father Terry Martin's passionate stance against bullfighting serves as a compelling example of why Christians should protest against animal cruelty. His efforts, rooted in biblical teachings and amplified

through collaboration with secular organisations like PETA, highlight the powerful impact of united action.

The voices of other UK vegan priests, such as Fathers John Ryder and Father Edward Owen, strengthen this call to action. Their unified stance demonstrates that compassion for animals is a deeply Christian value. The Revd Dr Jan Goodair's work with secular groups underscores the benefits of partnerships in this cause, showing that together, we can achieve more significant change.

As Christians continue to advocate against animal cruelty, we are reminded of the importance of prayer in our mission. Let us pray for strength and wisdom for those on the front lines of this cause, for the enlightenment of hearts and minds to recognise the sanctity of all God's creatures, and for the end of cruel practices that betray our duty as stewards of creation. Let us pray for unity among Christians and our secular allies as we work together towards a more compassionate and just world for all of God's creation.

Father Terry and PETA are urging Pope Francis to condemn the horrific bull torture events held in honour of Catholic saints. These events involve brutal and prolonged suffering for the bulls, contradicting our deeply held Christian values of compassion and mercy. By denouncing this cruelty, Pope Francis can help end this barbaric tradition and protect God's creatures. Your signature can make a significant difference in promoting a compassionate future for all living beings.





A bull used in a bullfight faces a matador preparing to plunge his sword into the bull's chest. San Sebastian de los Reyes, Madrid, Spain, 2010. Jo-Anne McArthur / We Animals Media

