



IN DEFENSE OF ANIMALS

Letter to Pope Francis in response to Laudate Deum

To His Holiness
Pope Francis
Vatican

Your Holiness,

While thanking you heartily for the exhortation Laudate Deum, we - the leaders of organizations whose members consider animals to be children of the same as their Father, and, following St Francis, our brothers and sisters - ask Your Holiness to address negative food system impacts at COP28 and for a specific teaching on morality in human-animal relations.

We ask Your Holiness to sound the alarm at COP28 about food system impacts missing from the Paris Agreement. Please use your influence to encourage collective action to safeguard our future. Johan Rockström, Director of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, says, "The final battle over whether we successfully deliver on the Paris Climate targets rests on whether we are able to transform the global food system."

This year scientists confirmed that six out of nine of our planetary boundaries have been breached. Mentioned earlier Johan Rockström, the highest class specialist, says, "The way that we produce food in the world is the single largest reason that we have transgressed planetary boundaries. It is the single largest threat to the stability of the planet and our life support systems, from fresh water, pollinators, and soil health, to rainfall generation, and quality of air and water. Present food production is putting our future at risk."

The animal agricultural industry which exploits animals is not only unethical, and unworthy of humanity, but is also estimated to be responsible for a huge proportion of greenhouse gas emissions. The pursuit of ever-increasing technological advances and the stimulation of artificial consumer desires regrettably have no moral boundaries, and the profit-oriented industry continues to withhold or deny the harm done to the animals, the environment, and human health.

The 2023 IPCC report says that food production systems are currently responsible for as much as a third of all emissions and are a major cause of biodiversity loss.¹ Of an estimated 8 million plant and animal species, around 1 million are threatened with

¹ Report IPCC, 2023 <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/syr/>

extinction.² The genetic biodiversity of plants and animals is being lost irretrievably at a high rate.³ The rampant livestock production, mainly for rich societies, is causing hunger in many parts of the world⁴, diseases and epidemics.⁵

According to many scientists, the phasing out of animal farming in favor of plant production represents the most immediate and feasible opportunity to reverse the trend of climate and environmental changes.^{6,7}

Your Holiness speaks of the need to care for non-human life on Earth. This is confirmed by the first sentences of the *Laudate Deum* exhortation, about the sensitivity of Jesus before the creatures of his Father, and about the sparrows, "not one of them forgotten in God's sight." And further, words about how other creatures of this world have stopped being our companions along the way and have become instead our victims, mere resources at our disposal. Earlier in the encyclical *Laudato Si'* we read that animals have intrinsic value and that man must reject despotic dominion and respect their nature. For man is not the purpose for which they exist. These words leave no doubt that Your Holiness knows that great harm is being done to animals today.

However, these thoughts contained in the teaching of Your Holiness are still not connected to reality and are not clear enough for people. For the majority, it is still not comprehensible with whom we share the 'ties of origin,' that Your Holiness speaks of, and what it means practically to restore God's intended harmony in Creation.

People prefer not to know what goes on behind the walls of farms, slaughterhouses, and laboratories. They do not believe the numerous reports and documentaries on animal abuse and exploitation. Evolutionary and cultural habits deeply ingrained in people cause abused animals to be outside the circle of empathy and morality. And yet, each of these trillions of animals is a separate valuable individual, terrified, experiencing physical and psychological pain. The scientific knowledge of their sensations and needs is already vast, so not counteracting this harm is a human fault and sin.

Like the poor of this world, animals are innocent and defenseless against violence. Christ would stand up for them. Yet, so many people, and painfully so many Christians,

² The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) Report, 2022

<https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en/c/cc0639en>

³ E. S. Brondizio, J. Settele, S. Díaz, H. T. Ngo, Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES, 2019)

⁴ M. Exposito-Alonso, T. R. Booker, L. Czech, T. Fukami, L. Gillespie, S. Hateley, C. C. Kyriazis, P. L. M. Lang, L. Leventhal, D. Nogues-Bravo, V. Pagowski, M. Ruffley, J. P. Spence, S. E. Toro Arana, C. L. Weiß, E. Zess, Genetic diversity loss in the Anthropocene. *Science* 377, 1431–1435 (2022)

⁵ Extinction or Regeneration Conference Transforming food systems for human, animal and planetary health, 11-12 May 2023, London.

<https://www.extinctionconference.com/event/8b5c7ac3-d913-464c-81b2-df7eabd85d92/summary>

⁶ Monika Zurek, Aniek Hebinck, Odirilwe Selomane. Climate change and the urgency to transform food systems, *Science* 2022, 23 Jun 2022, v. 376, no 6600, pp. 1416-1421

⁷ Svetlana V. Feigin et al. Proposed solutions to anthropogenic climate change: A systematic literature review and a new way forward. *Helyion*, 2023, v.9, 9, e20544

are indifferent to their harm. Words about the "universal family" are just words for them.

Therefore, there is a great need for clear and convincing teaching that no animal is forgotten in God's sight and every is due respect and care. Not only "sparrows," but also those tormented in industrial breeding: pigs, cows, chickens, fish. Also, animals tortured for human entertainment, animals in transport, in laboratories, and those who suffer from hunger, are being burned alive in forest fires or die in polluted waters.

This teaching is necessary because, without repairing the human-animal relationship, there will be no reconciliation between man and the world. It will be impossible to get rid of violence. Without changing what and how we produce food, we will not suppress climate change. There will never be harmony in Creation if we reduce animals to things and products to satisfy human appetites and whims.

The truth about the abuse of human power over animal brothers and sisters spoken by Your Holiness - a spiritual and ethical authority - can make a huge difference.

Again, while thanking you for all that Your Holiness is doing to awaken people's ecological consciences, we very much ask for a moral evaluation of contemporary practices utilized by animal exploitation industries and other practices that violate animal nature, are disastrous for the environment, and are a disgrace to humankind.

We respectfully ask you to call on societies to reduce the consumption of animal products, to transform food systems towards plant-based production, and to treat animals ethically and sensitively. This will be a powerful part of the response to the climate crisis.

We are sure that words of truth, as well as the example set by the Holy See and the institutions of the Church, would do much good. They would also be a great help in our grassroots work to repair the attitude of humans towards the rest of sentient Creation.

With deepest respect,

Interfaith Vegan Coalition, Plant Based Treaty, and Farm Forward



Interfaith Vegan Coalition Member Organizations & Signatories

- A Prayer for Compassion Film
- All-Creatures.org
- American Vegan Society
- Animals' Prayer Flag Project
- Bhakti Marga
- Catholic Action for Animals
- Christian Animal Rights Association
- Christian Vegetarian Association
- Christians for Animals (Poland)
- Circle of Compassion
- Climate Healers
- Committee of Consciousness
- Compassion Consortium
- Compassionate Living
- Compassionate Spirit
- Concern for Helping Animals in Israel
- Creation Care Church
- Dharma Voices for Animals
- Green Islam
- Faith Action for Animals
- Fraternité pour le Respect Animal (France)
- God's Creatures Ministry
- In Defense of Animals
- Interfaith Vegan Alliance
- Jewish Veg
- Karuna Music and Art

- Main Street Vegan Academy
- Million Vegan Grandmothers
- One Love Animal Connection Ministry
- PETA Lambs
- Quaker Animal Kinship
- SARX
- Seeds to Inspire Foundation
- Shamayim: Jewish Animal Advocacy
- St. Francis Alliance
- The Black Vegan Experience
- The Spiritual Forum
- The Vegan Museum
- Together in Creation
- United Poultry Concerns
- Vegan Spirituality
- Vegan World 2026
- World Vegan Assembly

Partner Organization

- Animal Interfaith Alliance

Allies

- CreatureKind
- Episcopal Network for Animal Welfare
- the Wellbeing
- Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry

Affiliation

- Compassion for All Animals Partner with the Charter for Compassion