



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

## The Roman Catholic Church

### General Information

The Roman Catholic Church is the world's largest Christian denomination, representing more than half of all Christians and more than one-sixth of the world's population. Final authority for the Church rests in the Magisterium: the College of Bishops headed by the Pope (currently Pope Francis).

More information about The Roman Catholic Church can be found by going to:  
[http://www.vatican.va/phome\\_en.htm](http://www.vatican.va/phome_en.htm)

**Number of Members in the US:** 75 million

**Number of Members Worldwide:** 1.22 billion

### Official Statements on Animals

#### *Humans may use animals “within reasonable limits”*

- **Humanity is the pinnacle of creation and the only creature possessing an immortal soul (although it is possible that animals possess mortal souls—see “Contemporary References,” below). Animals may be used, within limits, to serve human purposes.**
  - “At the centre of the whole of creation, He placed us, human beings, with our inalienable human dignity. Although we share many features with the rest of the living beings, Almighty God went further with us and gave us an immortal soul, the source of self-awareness and freedom, endowments that make us in His image and likeness (cf. *Gen* 1:26-31; 2:7).”  
—from Pope John Paul II, [Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics](#), Common Declaration of John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch His Holiness Bartholomew I, Monday, 10 June 2002
  - “God entrusted animals to the stewardship of those whom he created in his own image. Hence it is legitimate to use animals for food and clothing. They may be

domesticated to help man in his work and leisure. Medical and scientific experimentation on animals is a morally acceptable practice if it remains within reasonable limits and contributes to caring for or saving human lives.”

—from [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), Part Three, Section Two, Chapter Two, Article 7, 2:2417

**Animals should be respected because each contains the “imprint of the Creator” and reflects “a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness”**

- **Each creature reflects its Creator through “its own particular goodness and perfection.” The presence of God’s wisdom, goodness, and beauty within each creature “ought to inspire the respect and submission of men’s intellect and will.”**
  - “The doctrine of our faith is an even stronger stimulus for us to have a responsible and respectful relationship with Creation: in inanimate nature, in plants and in animals, we recognize the imprint of the Creator . . .”  
—from Pope Francis, [Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Italian Catholic Scout Movement for Adults \(MASCI\)](#), Paul VI Audience Hall, Saturday, 8 November 2014
  - “Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection . . . Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness.”  
—from [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), Part One, Section Two, Chapter One, Article 1, Paragraph 5, 2:339
  - “The beauty of creation reflects the infinite beauty of the Creator and ought to inspire the respect and submission of man’s intellect and will.”  
—from [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), Part One, Section Two, Chapter One, Article 1, Paragraph 5, 2:341

**God created animals and humans to live in harmony. Christ makes that harmony possible once again**

- **God created human beings to live in harmony with God, with each other, and with all creation. Sin disrupted this harmony, but Jesus’ death and resurrection make it possible once again.**
  - “The first man was not only created good, but was also established in friendship with his Creator and in harmony with himself and with the creation around him, in a state that would be surpassed only by the glory of the new creation in Christ.”  
—from [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), Part One, Section Two, Chapter One, Article 1, Paragraph 6, 4:374
  - “Christians believe that the Death and Resurrection of Christ accomplished the work of reconciling humanity to the Father, who ‘was pleased ... through (Christ) to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross’ (*Col 1:19-20*). Creation was thus made new (cf. *Rev 21:5*).

Once subjected to the bondage of sin and decay (cf. *Rom* 8:21), it has now received new life while ‘we wait for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’ (2 *Pt* 3:13). Thus, the Father ‘has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery . . . which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite *all things* in him, all things in heaven and things on earth’ (*Eph* 1:9-10).”

—from Pope John Paul II, *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace: 1 January 1990: [Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation](#)*, 1:4

### **The disruption of God’s intended harmony is a moral failing for which humans will be judged**

- **Since harmony with all creation is God’s intent, human actions that disrupt this harmony are sinful, harmful to ourselves and to future generations, and subject to God’s final judgment.**
  - “At the beginning of history, man and woman sinned by disobeying God and rejecting His design for creation. Among the results of this first sin was the destruction of the original harmony of creation. If we examine carefully the social and environmental crisis which the world community is facing, we must conclude that we are still betraying the mandate God has given us: to be stewards called to collaborate with God in watching over creation in holiness and wisdom.”  
—from Pope John Paul II, [Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics](#)
  - “There are other weak and defenceless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation. I am speaking of creation as a whole. We human beings are not only the beneficiaries but also the stewards of other creatures. . . Let us not leave in our wake a swath of destruction and death which will affect our own lives and those of future generations.”  
—from Pope Francis, [Apostolic Exhortation, Evangelii Gaudium, of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World.](#), Chapter 4, Section II, paragraph 215
  - “The steward must render an account of his stewardship, and the divine Master will judge his actions.”  
—from International Theological Commission, [Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God](#), Chapter 3, 61

### **Animals are God’s creatures. It is our duty to treat them with love and kindness**

- **Because God intends creation to exist in harmony, human dominion has limitations. At all times, dominion must be exercised as a form of service and love, mirroring God’s own service to and love for His creation.**
  - “Animals are the creatures of God, and, according to the Scriptures, he surrounds them with his providential care (Mt 6:26). Human beings should accept them with gratitude and, even adopting a eucharistic attitude with regard to every element of

creation, to give thanks to God for them. By their very existence the animals bless God and give him glory: “Bless the Lord, all you birds of the air. All you beasts, wild and tame, bless the Lord” (Dn 3:80-81). In addition, the harmony which man must establish, or restore, in the whole of creation includes his relationship to the animals. When Christ comes in his "glory, he will ‘recapitulate’ the whole of creation in an eschatological and definitive moment of harmony.”

—from International Theological Commission, [Communion and Stewardship](#), Chapter 3, section 2, paragraph 79

- “Animals are God’s creatures. He surrounds them with his providential care. By their mere existence they bless him and give him glory. Thus men owe them kindness. We should recall the gentleness with which saints like St. Francis of Assisi or St. Philip Neri treated animals....It is contrary to human dignity to cause animals to suffer or die needlessly.”

—from [Catechism of the Catholic Church](#), Part Three, Section Two, Chapter Two, Article 7, 2:2416, 2418

- “Employing royal imagery, it is said that human beings are called to rule in the sense of holding an ascendancy over the whole of visible creation, in the manner of a king. But the inner meaning of this kingship is, as Jesus reminds his disciples, one of service...”

—from International Theological Commission, [Communion and Stewardship](#), Chapter 3, paragraph 59

### Historical References on Animals

#### **St. Basil prayed for forgiveness for humanity’s “ruthless cruelty” toward animals**

- **Many Catholic saints have attempted to actualize Jesus’ vision of a restored harmony between people and animals. St. Basil (c. 330-c. 379 CE) prayed for forgiveness for past sins against “our brothers the animals” and for a future in which humans achieve fellowship with “all living things.”**

- “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof. O God, enlarge within us the sense of fellowship with all living things, our brothers the animals to whom thou hast given the earth as their home in common with us. We remember with shame that in the past we have exercised the high dominion of man with ruthless cruelty, so that the voice of the earth, which should have gone up to thee in song, has been a groan of travail. May we realize that they live, not for us alone, but for themselves and for thee, and that they have the sweetness of life.”

—a prayer from St. Basil (c. 330 CE-c. 379 CE), reprinted in Michael W. Fox, [The Boundless Circle: Caring for Creatures and Creation](#), (Quest Books, 1996), 50

#### **St. Francis of Assisi preached to animals, rescued them from slaughter, tended to their needs, and extolled their virtues**

- **In preparation for the canonization of St. Francis of Assisi (c. 1181-1226 CE), Pope Gregory IX commissioned an official biography to be written. This book, authored by Thomas of Celano, one of Francis' earliest followers, described multiple occasions when Francis preached to animals, rescued them from humanity's dinner table, provided them with food and comfort, and praised them to his followers.**

- “[Francis] reached a place near Bevagna, in which a great multitude of birds of different types gathered...When Francis...saw them, he ran swiftly toward them...Filled with great joy, he humbly requested that they listened to the word of God...After the birds had listened so reverently to the word of God, he began to accuse himself of negligence because he had not preached to them before. From that day on, he carefully exhorted all birds, all animals, all reptiles, and also insensible creatures, to praise and love the Creator, because daily, invoking the name of the Savior, he observed their obedience in his own experience...

“Once while he was staying near the town of Greccio, a certain brother brought him a live rabbit caught in a trap. Seeing it, the most blessed man was moved with tenderness, ‘Brother rabbit,’ he said, ‘come to me.’...As soon as the brother holding it let go, the rabbit, without any prompting, took shelter with the holy man, as in a most secure place, resting in his bosom. After it had rested there for a little while, the holy father, caressing it with motherly affection, let it go, so that now free it would return to the woods...

“He had the same tender feeling toward fish. When he had the chance he would throw back into the water live fish that had been caught, and he warned them to be careful not to be caught again...

“On another occasion...he came across a man on his way to market. The man was carrying over his shoulder two little lambs bound and ready for sale. When blessed Francis heard the bleating lambs, his innermost heart was touched and, drawing near, he touched them as a mother does with a crying child, showing his compassion. ‘Why are you torturing my brother lambs,’ he said to the man, ‘binding and hanging them this way?’ ‘I am carrying them to market to sell them, since I need the money,’ he replied. The holy man asked: ‘What will happen to them?’ ‘Those who buy them will kill them and eat them,’ he responded. At that, the holy man said: ‘No, this must not happen! Here, take my cloak as payment and give me the lambs.’ The man readily gave him the little lambs and took the cloak since it was much more valuable.

“Even for worms he had a warm love...That is why he used to pick them up from the road and put them in a safe place so they would not be crushed by the footsteps of passersby.

“In the winter he had honey or the best wine put out for the bees so that they would not perish from the cold. He used to extol the artistry of their work and their remarkable ingenuity, giving glory to the Lord. With such an outpouring, he often used up an entire day or more in praise of them and other creatures.”

—from Thomas of Celano, “The Life of Saint Francis,” (1228-1229), republished in Regis Armstrong, *The Francis Trilogy* (Hyde Park, NJ: New City Press, 2004), 75, 89-90

## Contemporary References on Animals

### *Pope Francis: God has joined us closely to the world around us. Nature shares a common destiny with us*

- In December of 2014, the world press ran a story declaring that Pope Francis had promised a grieving boy that he would be reunited with his deceased pet in heaven. The following day, the same news services scrambled to retract the story when it became clear that the incident had never occurred. The confusion seems to have arisen when an [Italian newspaper](#) included an unconfirmed anecdote about a grieving boy and Pope Paul VI (d. 1978) under the headline “Paradise for animals? The Pope doesn’t rule it out.”

One reason the story gained so much traction so quickly is because Pope Francis has consistently called upon Catholics to protect the natural world. Although he has not spoken about animals and the afterlife, he has declared that in this life, God has created a common destiny for humans and animals and has “joined us so closely” to them that we can feel their loss “as a painful disfigurement.”

- “God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement... Here I would make my own the touching and prophetic lament voiced some years ago by the bishops of the Philippines: ‘An incredible variety of insects lived in the forest and were busy with all kinds of tasks... Birds flew through the air, their bright plumes and varying calls adding color and song to the green of the forests... God intended this land for us, his special creatures, but not so that we might destroy it and turn it into a wasteland... After a single night’s rain, look at the chocolate brown rivers in your locality and remember that they are carrying the life blood of the land into the sea... How can fish swim in sewers...? Who has turned the wonderworld of the seas into underwater cemeteries bereft of color and life?’

“Small yet strong in the love of God, like Saint Francis of Assisi, all of us, as Christians, are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live, and all its peoples.”

—from Pope Francis, [Apostolic Exhortation, \*Evangelii Gaudium\*, of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World.](#), Chapter 4, Section II, paragraph 215-216.

- “*Lead the way in creation.* Our time cannot ignore the issue of ecology, which is vital to man’s survival, nor reduce it to merely a political question: it has a moral dimension that affects everyone, such that no one can ignore it. As disciples of Christ, we have a further reason to join with all men and women of good will to protect and defend nature and the environment. Creation is, in fact, a gift entrusted to us from the hands of the Creator. All of nature that surrounds us is created like us, created together with us, and in a common destiny it tends to find its fulfillment and ultimate end in God himself—the Bible says ‘new heavens and a new earth’ (cf. Is 65:17, 2 Pet 3:13, Rev 21:1). This doctrine of our faith is an

even stronger stimulus for us to have a responsible and respectful relationship with Creation: in inanimate nature, in plants and in animals, we recognize the imprint of the Creator, and in our fellow kind, His very image.”

—from Pope Francis, [\*Address to the Italian Catholic Scout Movement\*](#)

**Pope John Paul II: Only humans have immortal souls, but animals may have mortal souls**

- **During a general audience in January of 1990, Pope John Paul II stated that both “man” and “animal” are created from the “spirit or breath of God” and “under this aspect man...appears in solidarity with all living beings.” This statement was interpreted by some as a papal declaration that animals have souls. In 2002, the Pope partially clarified confusion about this issue by reiterating the long-standing Catholic doctrine that only human souls are “immortal”—a statement that leaves open the possibility that animals may have mortal souls.**
- “We read that, after having formed man from the dust of the ground, the Lord God ‘breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being’ (Gen 2:7)...In man there is a breath or spirit similar to the breath or spirit of God. When the Book of Genesis speaks in chapter two of the creation of the animals (v. 19), it does not hint at such a close relationship with the breath of God...Other texts, however, admit that the animals also have a vital breath or wind and that they received it from God. Under this aspect man, coming forth from the hands of God, appears in solidarity with all living beings.”  
—from Pope John Paul II, [\*The Creative Action of the Divine Spirit\*](#), General Audience, January 7, 1990
- “Although we share many features with the rest of the living beings, Almighty God went further with us and gave us an immortal soul, the source of self-awareness and freedom, endowments that make us in His image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-31; 2:7).”  
—from Pope John Paul II, [\*Peace with God the Creator, Peace with all of Creation\*](#), 5:16

**Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger: The “industrial use” of animals violates “the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible”**

- **Before becoming Pope, Benedict XVI (known at the time as Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger) was asked if humans are allowed to eat animals. He replied that we are “not forbidden” to use animals for food, but that any use of animals must conform to the biblical directive to treat animals with respect. “Industrial use of creatures”—the large-scale, confined rearing of animals—contradicts this directive.**
- “...we can see that [animals] are given into our care, that we cannot just do whatever we want with them. Animals, too, are God’s creatures and even if they do not have the same direct relation to God that man has, they are creatures of his

will, creatures we must respect as companions in creation .... (Man) should always maintain his respect for these creatures, but he knows at the same time that he is not forbidden to take food from them. Certainly, a sort of industrial use of creatures, so that geese are fed in such a way as to produce as large a liver as possible, or hens live so packed together that they become just caricatures of birds, this degrading of living creatures to a commodity seems to me in fact to contradict the relationship of mutuality that comes across in the Bible.”

—from Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, [\*God and the World: A Conversation with Peter Seewald\*](#), (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002), 78-79

### **US Conference of Catholic Bishops: Agricultural practices should protect wildlife**

- **The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops has a long history of involvement with agricultural policy issues. The Bishops support agricultural policies that protect human life, soil quality, and wildlife. “All creation,” says the Conference, “is a gift;” caring for animals is a form of stewardship that should “reverence and respect...God’s creation.”**
  - “Care for God’s creation is a central calling for believers. Agricultural and food policies should reward practices that protect human life, encourage soil conservation, improve water quality, protect wildlife, and maintain the diversity of the ecosystem.”  
—from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, [\*For I was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections of Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers\*](#), Pastoral Reflection, Section V, Criteria for Agricultural Policy and Advocacy
  - “All creation is a gift. Scripture tells us that ‘the earth is the Lord’s, and all it holds’ (Ps 24:1). All of us, especially those closest to the land, are called to special reverence and respect for God’s creation. Nurturing and tilling the soil, harnessing the power of water to grow food, and caring for animals are forms of this stewardship.”  
—from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, [\*For I was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections of Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers\*](#), Catholic Social Teaching and Agriculture, Section VI

### **US Conference of Catholic Bishops: Factory farms should be regulated and monitored; animals should be treated as “creatures of God”**

- **According to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, Catholic teachings call into “question certain farming practices,” including the factory farming of animals. These practices, say the Bishops, should be regulated and monitored in order to ensure that animals are treated as God’s creatures.**
  - “Catholic teaching about stewardship of creation leads us to question certain farming practices, such as the operation of massive confined animal feeding operations. We believe that these operations should be carefully regulated and monitored so that environmental risks are minimized and animals are treated as creatures of God.”

—from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, [For I was Hungry and You Gave Me Food: Catholic Reflections on Food, Farmers, and Farmworkers](#), A Catholic Agenda for Action, Section V

**US Conference of Catholic Bishops: Let us pray that God will “make us all true friends of animals”**

➤ **The US Conference of Catholic Bishops has created prayers and liturgies celebrating creation and emphasizing our responsibility to protect God’s creatures. In a special section called *Prayers for Animals*, the Bishops remind us that God intends us to be friends to animals and to treat them with “a gentle heart of compassion.”**

- “Hear our humble prayer, O God,  
For our friends the animals, your creatures.  
We pray especially for all that are suffering in any way:  
For the overworked and underfed,  
The hunted, lost, or hungry;  
For all in captivity or ill-treated,  
And for those that must be put to death.  
For those who deal with them,  
We ask a gentle heart of compassion,  
Gentle hands, and kindly words.  
Make us all true friends to animals  
And worthy followers of our merciful Savior, Jesus Christ.  
R. Amen

—from United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, [Prayers to Care for Creation](#), “Other Prayers for Animals”

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