



## Catholic Concern for Animals

His Holiness Pope Francis  
Apostolic Palace, 00120 Vatican City

28<sup>th</sup> February 2023

Your Holiness,

We are writing in great sorrow and regret in relation to the recent events involving Rony Roller Circus in Rome on February 11.

We are referring to the Vatican's organisation of the circus event and to the interactions of Cardinal Krajewski with a captive elephant, as described in the CRUX article below:

<https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2023/02/animal-rights-group-blasts-pope-krajewski-for-circus-outing-with-elephants>

We fail to see how it is possible, on the one hand, to point out the dignity of every creature, derived from the fact that they are created by God, as Your Holiness has made clear in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, which is an articulation of core biblical principles, and, on the other hand, for a very senior member of the Church to support actions that target this very same dignity.

Your Holiness has written that *"when our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings. We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people. Every act of cruelty towards any creature is 'contrary to human dignity'"*.

We fully agree with these comments but then we strongly believe that they are incompatible with accepting the use of wild animals in circuses.

We believe that it is wrong to train these animals for human entertainment. It is unnecessary cruelty to animals and is unacceptable.

In recent years, the full horror involved in keeping animals within circuses has become well known and there is already a total or partial ban on the use of animals in circuses in dozens of cities and countries. The fact that this cruelty is happening so close to the Vatican is particularly shocking.

Elephants are highly social animals. Baby elephants spend ten years with their mothers before they mature to independence. When necessary, they are cared for in solidarity by other

females in the herd. Elephants mourn their dead. They have excellent memory, which makes them suffer from flashbacks and traumas from the past, and the herd even after many years returns to the place where they lost a family member. They cooperate with each other and communicate in language, that uses infrasound. They are capable of self-awareness, prediction, and judgment. Precisely because of these remarkable qualities, they have been used in circuses and for work for centuries.

To make them obedient, baby elephants between one and a half and two years old are forcibly dragged away from their mothers, who are chained to the wall beforehand so they don't fight over the baby. It takes several people to do this. Weighing several hundred kilograms, the baby is placed in an enclosure, where the first stage of training is to 'break his/her soul.' This is done by confining the animal child in a tight cage and immobilizing him/her there with ropes and chains. Then she/he is inflicted with pain, wounds, and beatings with sharp hooks all over the body, especially on particularly sensitive parts (the inside of the ears, the trunk, the lower abdomen), until the elephant stops defending itself and screaming. When the animal quiets down, it means that her/his will has been broken and the creature is ready for circus training.

The training uses hooks, which are hammered into sensitive places to force the elephant to kneel, sit and walk over the barriers. If necessary, stun guns and tranquilizers are used. Elephants being adapted to drive tourists are hammered in the ears and feet with nails until they become obedient.

Not even half of the elephants survive the training. Those who survive live in fear of humans. We refer to the words of St John Henry Newman:

*"Cruelty to animals is something as if a man did not love God... There is something terrifying, satanic in abusing those who have never harmed us and who cannot defend themselves, who are completely subject to our power."*

Yet, it is not the first time that the poor and excluded have been invited by the Vatican to a circus with animals, to the shows that demonstrate the violence, harm, and humiliation of the animals. As well as providing a regrettable example of how to treat our fellow animals, this is demeaning of such vulnerable audiences as it implies that they are so morally corrupt as to take pleasure in such barbaric spectacles. Furthermore, it should be mentioned that throughout their history, circuses have also been a place of humiliation for the disabled and sick.

And how to reconcile the approval of the devaluing use of wild, close to extinction animals in circuses with the words of the encyclical: *"But it is not enough to think of various species only as possible 'resources' to be exploited, forgetting that they have intrinsic value. ...Because of us, thousands of species will not by their existence glorify God, nor will they convey their message to us. We have no right to do so."* (LS: 33)

Your Holiness has written that *"Authentic human development has a moral character. ...it must also be concerned for the world around us and 'take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system'. Accordingly, our human ability to transform reality must proceed in line with God's original gift of all that is."* (LS:5)

As Christians from around the world who care about animals, and who recognize that God's love of creation includes the love of animals, we utterly condemn the use of animals for entertainment in such circuses.

Of course, cruelty associated with circuses is one manifestation of a larger problem, which is the systemic, institutional abuse of animals. An indication of the evils of human conduct toward God's sentient beings.

For decades, not to say hundreds of years, an increasing number of Catholics have been demanding a detailed moral teaching, taking into account reality and knowledge concerning human-animal relations.

Unfortunately, we still wait.

All the while the cries and pleas for mercy of billions of animals tortured by humans in every corner of the world are ringing in the sky.

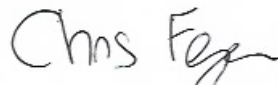
We have the honour to profess ourselves with the most profound respect. Your Holiness' most obedient and humble servants.

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