

Catholic Social Teaching on Care for Creation and Stewardship of the Earth

The Catholic Church has a well-documented tradition of Care for Creation and Stewardship of the Earth.

This resource includes elements of Catholic teaching that highlight this tradition.

This resource is intended to serve as an introduction on this issue; it is not comprehensive.

Audience with Representatives of the Churches and Ecclesial Communities and of the Different Religions
Pope Francis, March 2013

“The Church is likewise conscious of the responsibility which all of us have for our world, for the whole of creation, which we must love and protect. There is much that we can do to benefit the poor, the needy and those who suffer, and to favor justice, promote reconciliation and build peace.”

Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching, 1991 (no. 2)

“Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human. Our tradition calls us to protect the life and dignity of the human person, and it is increasingly clear that this task cannot be separated from the care and defense of all creation.”

World Environment Day, Pope Francis, June 2013

“We are losing the attitude of wonder, contemplation, listening to creation. The implications of living in a horizontal manner [is that] we have moved away from God, we no longer read His signs.”

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church
Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005 (no. 466)

“Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good, destined for all, by preventing anyone from using ‘with impunity the different categories of beings, whether living or inanimate—animals, plants, the natural elements—simply as one wishes, according to one’s own economic needs.’ It is a responsibility that must mature on the basis of the global dimension of the present ecological crisis and the consequent necessity to meet it on a worldwide level, since all beings are interdependent in the universal order established by the Creator. ‘One must take into account the nature of each being and of its mutual connection in an ordered system, which is precisely the ‘cosmos’”.

World Day of Peace, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, 2007

“Alongside the ecology of nature, there exists what can be called a ‘human’ ecology, which in turn demands a ‘social’ ecology. All this means that humanity, if it truly desires peace, must be increasingly conscious of the links between natural ecology, or respect for nature, and human ecology. Experience shows that disregard for the environment always harms human coexistence, and vice versa. It becomes more and more evident that there is an inseparable link between peace with creation and peace among men.

Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching, 1991 (no. 8)

“Created things belong not to the few, but to the entire human family.”



The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church
Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005

“There is a need to break with the logic of mere consumption and promote forms of agricultural and industrial production that respect the order of creation and satisfy the basic human needs of all. These attitudes, sustained by a renewed awareness of the interdependence of all the inhabitants of the earth, will contribute to eliminating the numerous causes of ecological disasters as well as guaranteeing the ability to respond quickly when such disasters strike people and territories. The ecological question must not be faced solely because of the frightening prospects that environmental destruction represents: rather it must above all become a strong motivation for an authentic solidarity of worldwide dimensions” (no. 486).

Address to Diplomatic Corps, January 2010

Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI

“[T]his concern and commitment for the environment should be situated within the larger framework of the great challenges now facing mankind. If we wish to build true peace, how can we separate, or even set at odds, the protection of the environment and the protection of human life, including the life of the unborn? It is in man’s respect for himself that his sense of responsibility for creation is shown.”

“How can we forget, for that matter the struggle for access to natural resources is one of the causes of a number of conflicts, not the least in Africa, as well as a continuing threat elsewhere? For this reason too, I forcefully repeat that to cultivate peace, one must protect creation!”

On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio), Pope Paul VI, 1967

“Already on the first page of Sacred Scripture we read these words: ‘Fill the earth and subdue it’ (Gn 1:28). By these words we are taught that all things of the world have been created for man, and that this task has been entrusted to him to enhance their value by the resources of his intellect, and by his toil to complete and perfect them for his own use. Now if the earth has been created for the purpose of furnishing individuals either with the necessities of a livelihood or the means for progress, it follows that each man has the right to get from it what is necessary for him. The Second Ecumenical Vatican Council has reminded us of this in these words: ‘God destined the earth with all that it contains for the use of all men and nations, in such a way that created things in fair share should accrue to all men under the leadership of justice with charity as a companion.’” (no. 22)

Charity in Truth (Caritas in Veritate)
Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, 2009

“The protection of the environment, of resources and of the climate obliges all international leaders to act justly and to show a readiness to work in good faith, respecting the law and promoting solidarity with the weakest regions of the planet.” (no. 50)

Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good, 2001

“At its core, global climate change is not about economic theory or political platforms, nor about partisan advantage or interest group pressures. It is about the future of God’s creation and the one human family. It is about protecting both ‘the human environment’ and the natural environment. It is about our human stewardship of God’s creation and our responsibility to those who come after us.”

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church
Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2005 (no. 462)

“With the progress of science and technology, questions as to their meaning increase and give rise to an ever greater need to respect the transcendent dimension of the human person and creation itself.”

Economic Justice for All, 1997 (no. 34)
citing St. Cyprian

“From the patristic period to the present, the Church has affirmed that misuse of the world’s resources or appropriation of them by a minority of the world’s population betrays the gift of creation since ‘whatever belongs to God belongs to all.’”

