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.”
“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)