

## Care for God's Creation

*The 10 second Summary:*

### What Does The Church Say About The Care For God's Creation?

God's love is made known through God's creation, incarnation and ongoing revelation. In the Book of Genesis we read how God speaks and God's word brings all things into being. This life-giving word brings order out of chaos. Creation has an order and a purpose ordained and willed by God, and God names it "good." The goodness of creation therefore is a divine proclamation. The human person is created last from the clay of the earth, the only creation made in the image and likeness of God. Human beings are to live in partnership with creation, drawing life and sustenance from it and in turn treating all creation with care and reverence. Human beings are to be stewards, the voice of creation, protecting and respecting its use and existence.

- *One's relationship with God is inextricably bound up with one's relationship with creation.*

### Where Does This Teaching Come From?

- **Scripture**—Biblical source: rooted in scripture
- **Tradition**—Moral source: located in the Catholic tradition, shaped by the past and the present.
- **Teaching**—Ecclesial source: expressed in the Pope's Encyclical letters, Apostolic letters, Apostolic exhortations, and the Bishops' Pastoral letters, which respond to the issues of the day. (This source is often what is referred to as Catholic Social Teaching.)

*How does this teaching connect with my life?*

**It provides:**

- Principles for reflection;
- Criteria for judgment;
- Guidelines for action;
- Tools for conscience formation.



*“The world presents itself before our eyes as evidence of God, the place where God’s creative, providential and redemptive power unfolds.”*

-Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, #487.

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What Are Some Of The Historical Threats To Care For God's Creation That Caused The Church To Take Note And Respond?<sup>1</sup>

What were the signs of the times?	Document & Year	What was presented?
Great suffering and poverty in developing countries, accentuated by the growing global divide between the rich and poor of the world, is a critical concern.	<i>On the Development of Peoples (Populorum Progressio)</i> , 1967	Respect for the universal purpose of creation (God intends the earth and its goods for all) is needed for authentic development.
New social problems of urbanization (poverty, marginalization, etc.), including the environment, emerge.	<i>A Call to Action (Octogesima Adveniens)</i> , 1971	The harmful exploitation of nature is leading to an "environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable." People have a responsibility to respect the environment.
A growing awareness that resources and the biosphere are not infinite develops—they must be saved and preserved.	<i>Justice in the World (Justicia in Mundo)</i> , 1971	Concern for the environment is expressed in the context of discussions of development. Richer nations are using too much energy and resources, to the detriment of nature. Conservation of natural resources is needed.
An increasing interdependence in the world is becoming apparent. There is also a growing awareness of the need to respect the integrity and cycles of creation.	<i>The Social Concerns of the Church (Sollicitudo Rei Socialis)</i> , 1988	Ecological solidarity (among peoples and nations, and with future generations) is treated for the first time; ecological solidarity is essential to true development. John Paul II notes that the earth's resources are limited, and that pollution threatens the health of all.
The fall of communism has brought attention to the newly independent countries of Eastern Europe and their development, including environmental concerns.	<i>One Hundred Years (Centesimus Annus)</i> , 1991	John Paul II states that "an anthropological error" lies at the root of the mistreatment of the environment. He cautions against this arbitrary use of the earth "as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose."

Sources:

Himes, Kenneth R., *Responses to 101 Questions on Catholic Social Teaching*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2001.

Judith Dwyer, ed. *The New Dictionary of Catholic Social Teaching*. Collegeville, Minn. : Liturgical Press, 1994. s.v. "Ecology," by Thomas Ryan, S.M.

Keenan, Marjorie, *Care for Creation: Human Activity and the Environment*. Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2000.

## How Has This Teaching Developed Over The Years?

- This teaching is solidly rooted in scripture. Throughout scripture we see God's love for all of creation, beginning in Genesis.
- The Church's response to the ecological challenge dates from the time of Pope Paul VI.
- With the Papacy of John Paul II, concern for the environment has more explicitly entered into Catholic Social Teaching. His 1990 World Day of Peace Message was the first papal pronouncement devoted exclusively to environmental concerns.
- Currently, a great deal of study and writing is being done around global climate change at the Vatican as well as within various Bishops' Conferences worldwide.

### Did you Know . . . ?

Much of the harm done to the environment today is caused by a lack of solidarity; that is, the "*firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good.*"<sup>1</sup>

For example, companies often seek to obtain raw materials at the lowest possible cost in order to make the most profit. These low-cost practices are often very detrimental to the environment, and thus detrimental to the people in surrounding communities and the people of future generations.

Another example is the unbridled consumerism and waste in the United States. In our attempt to satisfy momentary wants and desires, we plunder resources and consume energy—resources and energy that belong to all the people of the earth. And yet, millions of people live in destitution, barely able to obtain what they need for survival.

In order to meet today's ecological challenges, we must pray for a conversion of the heart that will lead to personal change. We must also commit ourselves to supporting structural changes that will benefit the environment, and thus, all of humanity.

<sup>1</sup> *The Social Concerns of the Church*, #38

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## What Does The Catechism of the Catholic Church Say About The Care For God's Creation?

- #280** Creation is the foundation of “all God’s saving plans,” the “beginning of the history of salvation” that culminates in Christ. Conversely, the mystery of Christ casts conclusive light on the mystery of creation and reveals the end for which “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”: from the beginning, God envisaged the glory of the new creation in Christ.
- #282** Catechesis on creation is of major importance. It concerns the very foundations of human and Christian life: for it makes explicit the response of the Christian faith to the basic question that men of all times have asked themselves: “Where do we come from?” “Where are we going?” “What is our origin?” “What is our end?” “Where does everything that exists come from and where is it going?” The two questions, the first about the origin and the second about the end, are inseparable. They are decisive for the meaning and orientation of our life and actions.
- #291** “In the beginning was the Word . . . and the Word was God . . . all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made.” The New Testament reveals that God created everything by the eternal Word, his beloved Son. In him “all things were created, in heaven and on earth . . . all things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” The Church’s faith likewise confesses the creative action of the Holy Spirit, the “giver of life,” “the Creator Spirit” (“*Veni, Creator Spiritus*”), the “source of every good.”
- #295-301** God creates by wisdom and love; God creates “out of nothing”; God creates an ordered and good world; God transcends creation and is present to it. God upholds and sustains creation;
- #314** We firmly believe that God is master of the world and of its history. But the ways of God’s providence are often unknown to us. Only at the end, when our partial knowledge ceases, when we see God “face to face,” will we fully know the ways by which—even through the dramas of evil and sin—God has guided God’s creation to that definitive Sabbath rest for which he created heaven and earth.
- #339** Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection. For each one of the works of the “six days” it is said: “And God saw that it was good.” “By the very nature of creation, material being is endowed with its own stability, truth, and excellence, its own order and laws.” Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God’s infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment.
- #2415** The seventh commandment enjoins respect for the integrity of creation. Animals, like plants and inanimate beings, are by nature destined for the common good of past, present, and future humanity. Use of the mineral, vegetable, and animal resources of the universe cannot be divorced from respect for moral imperatives. Man’s dominion over inanimate and other living beings granted by the Creator is not absolute; it is limited by concern for the quality of life of his neighbor, including generations to come; it requires a religious respect for the integrity of creation.
- #2432** Those *responsible for business enterprises* are responsible to society for the economic and ecological effects of their operations. They have an obligation to consider the good of persons and not only the increase of profits. Profits are necessary, however. They make possible the investments that ensure the future of a business and they guarantee employment.
- #2452** The goods of creation are destined for the entire human race. The right to private property does not abolish the universal destination of goods.

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## Questions For Reflection And Discussion:

1. The Book of Genesis is an essential source for reflection on creation and its place in God's created order. How have I understood this text in the past? How might I read it differently with new awareness of a sacramental view of creation with God as creator and sustainer of ALL life, ALL creation?
2. How are we to fulfill God's call to be stewards of creation in an age when we may have the capacity to alter that creation significantly and perhaps irrevocably?
3. How can we as a "family of nations" exercise stewardship in a way that respects and protects the integrity of God's creation and provides for the common good, as well as for economic and social progress based on justice?
4. Have you ever heard of the term, "social sin?" (Social sin arises when people copy or cooperate with one another in allowing and promoting sin. This is often evident in what becomes socially acceptable or what is institutionalized in the social structure or laws. Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1869) How is disregard or degradation of the environment a form of social sin?
5. How does creation and view toward its proper care, reverence and protection fit into a catholic notion of the seamless web of life?
6. Are there concrete ways in which I display a reverence for the earth in my daily life? (gardening, recycling, careful use of fossil fuels, choices to consume less, organic options at the market, mindful consumption, memberships in co-ops, etc.).
7. How does the earth echo the voice of God?

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*Faced with the widespread destruction of the environment, people everywhere are coming to understand that we cannot continue to use the goods of the Earth as we have in the past. ...a new ecological awareness is beginning to emerge...*

Pope John Paul II, The Ecological Crisis:  
A Common Responsibility (Dec. 1989)

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## More On The Care For God's Creation From CST:

Christians, in particular, realize that their responsibility within creation and their duty towards nature and the Creator are an essential part of their faith.

*On the Development of Peoples, #15*

God destined the earth with all that it contains for the use of all people and nations, in such a way that created things in fair share should accrue to all people under the leadership of justice with charity as a companion.

*Vatican II, The Church in the Modern World, #69*

It is a requirement of our human dignity and therefore a serious responsibility, to exercise dominion over creation in such a way that it truly serves the human family. Exploitation of the riches of nature must take place according to criteria that take into account not only the immediate needs of people but also the needs of future generations. In this way, the stewardship over nature, entrusted by God to human beings, will not be guided by shortsightedness or selfish pursuit; rather, it will take into account the fact that all created goods are directed to the good of all humanity. The use of natural resources must aim at serving the integral development of present and future generations.

*Address to the UN Centre, Nairobi, Kenya, 18 August 1985, N. 2; Insegnamenti di Giovanni Paolo II. VII, 2 (1985), p477-484.*

It is manifestly unjust that a privileged few should continue to accumulate excess goods, squandering available resources, while masses of people are living in conditions of misery at the very lowest level of subsistence. Today, the dramatic threat of ecological breakdown is teaching us the extent to which greed and selfishness—both individual and collective—are contrary to the order of creation, an order that is characterized by mutual interdependence.

*Pope John Paul II, 1990 World Day of Peace Message, #8*

The human person, who discovers his or her capacity to transform and in a certain sense create the world through his or her own work, forgets that this is always based on God's prior and original gift of the things that are. The human person thinks that he or she can make arbitrary use of the earth, subjecting it without restraint to his or her will, as though it did not have its own requisites and a prior God-given purpose, which the human person can indeed develop but must not betray. Instead of carrying out his or her role as a cooperator with God in the work of creation, the human person sets himself or herself up in the place of God and thus ends up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannized than governed by him or her.

*Pope John Paul II, One Hundred Years, #37*

Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage, which these attitudes cause. Simplicity, moderation and discipline, as well as a spirit of sacrifice, must become part of everyday life, lest all suffer the negative consequences of the careless habits of a few.

*Pope John Paul II, Call for Ecological Conversion, January 18, 2001, General Audience*

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Humans are suddenly becoming aware that by an ill-considered exploitation of nature they risk destroying it and becoming in turn the victim of this degradation . . . The Christian must turn to these new perceptions in order to take on responsibility, together with the rest of humanity, for a destiny which from now on is shared by all.

*A Call to Action, #21*

Among today's positive signs we must also mention a greater realization of the limits of available resources, and of the need to respect the integrity and the cycles of nature and to take them into account when planning for development, rather than sacrificing them to certain demagogic ideas about the latter. Today this is called ecological concern.

Pope John Paul II, *The Social Concerns of the Church*, #26

The dominion accorded to man by the Creator is not an absolute power, nor can one speak of freedom to "use and abuse" nor to utilize things as one pleases. The limitation imposed by the Creator from the very beginning and expressed symbolically with the prohibition against 'eating of the fruit of the tree' (Genesis 2:16) shows with sufficient clarity that in the relationship with visible nature, we are subject to laws which are not only biological, but also moral, and they may not be transgressed with impunity.

Pope John Paul II, *The Social Concerns of the Church*, #34.

## Other Papal Writings of Relevance and Interest:

- John Paul II, *World Day of Peace Message*, (Vatican City, 1990).
- John Paul II, *The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1990).
- John Paul II, "International Solidarity Needed to Safeguard Environment," Address by the Holy Father to the European Bureau for the Environment, *L'Osservatore Romano* (June 26, 1996).

## Notable Pastoral Letters of Bishops on the Care for God's Creation:

- *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, United States Catholic Bishops, November, 1991.
- *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, United States Catholic Bishops, June, 2001.
- *Stewardship: A Disciple's Response* (Washington, D.C.: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1993).
- *What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?: A Pastoral Letter on Ecology*, Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, January, 1988.
- "And God Saw That It Was Good" A Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of the Boston Province October 4, 2000.