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in this issue

Finding our Place in *Laudato Si'* 10 Years on

Dr Greg Marcar

The Joyful and Troubling *Laudato Si'*

Prof David Tombs

Honouring Pope Francis' Call to Action

Prof Jim McAloon

Economy Unplugged: The Link Between Integral Ecology and Economics

Adrienne Gallie

Economy and Ecology: *Laudato Si'* and the "Throwaway" Culture

Rev Dr Alfred Tong

Ten Years on, the Challenge in *Laudato Si'* is More Urgent

Rev John Howell

Stewarding Creation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Julianne Hickey

Laudato Si': A Call to a New Way of Thinking

Dr Petrus Simons

"Be good today, but better tomorrow": A Mercy Perspective

Natasha Watson

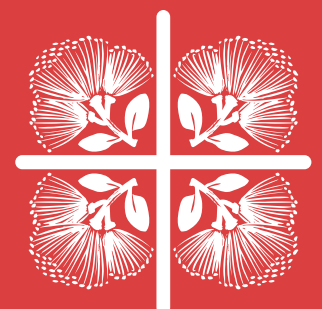
"...our friendship with God is always linked to particular places"

Dr Kathleen Rushton

Regulatory Standards Bill 2025 Submission to the Finance and Expenditure Committee

Staff of the Nathaniel Centre

Select Quotations from *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*



The Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics was established in 1999 as an agency of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference. In 2020, the Centre was formally affiliated with Te Kupenga – The Catholic Leadership Institute.

The key functions of The Nathaniel Centre include:

- developing educational opportunities in bioethics
- acting as an advisory and resource centre for individuals, and professional, educational and community groups
- carrying out research into bioethical issues, and promoting the study and practical resolution of ethical, social, cultural and legal challenges arising out of clinical practice and scientific research
- carrying out research and action to support the Church's pastoral response to bioethical issues taking into account the needs of different cultures and groups in society.

Our Philosophy

Rapid advances in science have moral, ethical, and spiritual implications at an individual and societal level. While Catholic bioethics deals with the same realities as secular bioethics we are committed to bringing the light of the Gospel and the wisdom from the Church's moral tradition to the various issues under discussion.

Reason and faith do not exist in isolation; they guide our individual and collective search for truth and they complement each other when they meet in genuine service of those who suffer. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "Only in charity, illumined by the light of reason and faith, is it possible to pursue development goals that possess a more humane and humanising value." In this way, the work of bioethics appears as a practical expression of the reverence we have for the gift of life.

For The Nathaniel Centre, the context of bioethics is pastoral, because the ethical issues arising in healthcare and the life sciences reflect the realities of people's lives.

Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth...

POPE JOHN PAUL II

... faith consolidates, integrates and illuminates the heritage of truth acquired by human reason.

POPE BENEDICT XVI

An authentic faith ... always involves a deep desire to change the world ... to leave this earth somehow better than we found it.

POPE FRANCIS



IN THIS ISSUE...

This themed issue of the *Nathaniel Report* commemorates the 10-year anniversary of Pope Francis' seminal encyclical on God's creation and humanity's role within it, *Laudato Si'* ("On Care for Our Common Home").

Laudato Si''s anniversary occurs at a time when the international community is increasingly cognisant of global environmental crises and their urgency. In July 2025, the International Criminal Court affirmed that States have an obligation – under both international legal treaties and international human rights law – to "protect the climate system and other parts of the environment". This judgement comes two years after the UN's formal recognition of a human right to a healthy environment (July 2023), and amidst ongoing efforts to have "ecocide" added as a crime under international criminal law. These developments align with the message of *Laudato Si'* and its vision of an interconnected and "integral" ecology.

Laudato Si' instructively observes that "[t]here can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology" (LS #118). In the Editorial, **Dr Greg Marcar** highlights the importance in *Laudato Si'* of understanding ourselves as human beings by attending to our "place" within God's creation, which is to be an instrument of divine love. How we relate to the natural world follows from how we understand ourselves, which in turn follows from our humble appreciation of God's love towards all creatures.

As further explored in subsequent contributions, attending to the analogy of our "home" in *Laudato Si'* provides an etymological link (through the shared Greek root of *oikos*) between the economy, the management of our familial "household", and ecology: the management of our "home" within creation. The contributors to this volume show how, through this conceptual connection, *Laudato Si'* continues to provide a theological and moral corrective to what the encyclical calls today's "throwaway culture", as well as the "technocratic paradigm" that entails an instrumentalist, domineering, and – as **Prof David Tombs** explores – ultimately *violent* attitude towards other creatures.

By re-orientating our understanding of who and what human beings are within the context of "our common home", *Laudato Si'* has significant implications for how "freedom", property "rights" and the contours of a flourishing human "life" are understood. While recent political thought often appears to conceive individuals' freedom in terms of their ability to assert proprietary rights over other creatures and their environment, *Laudato Si'* presents an alternative vision in which true human freedom is fundamentally informed by our duties of stewardship and care for the rest of creation – a theme which underpins our final article, a Submission by the **Staff of the Nathaniel Centre** on the 2025 Regulatory Standards Bill.

Finding our Place in *Laudato Si'* 10 Years on

Dr Greg Marcar

Christian anthropology – that is, our understandings of what human beings are and should be – is often characterised by a fundamental tension: on the one hand, as creatures, human beings are an integral part of the physical creation; on the other hand, it has been said that we are also “pilgrims” or “sojourners” on this earth, destined for a more permanent, spiritual home. Ten years ago, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (“On Care for Our Common Home”) (2015), Pope Francis understood the need to address this tension when he stated, with characteristic directness, that “[t]here can be no ecology without an adequate anthropology” (LS #118).

Our current anthropological confusion, Pope Francis explains, has its roots in the fact that human beings “misunderstand themselves” when they “fail to find their true place in this world” (LS #115). As an example of this, Pope Francis points towards the “technocratic paradigm” of modern society, under which human beings deny their interconnectedness with other creatures and shared vulnerabilities, with the result that they then become “enthralled” with the mistaken possibility of “limitless mastery over everything” (LS #224). Under the spell of this enthrallment, the temptation arises for us to see humanity’s place as one where, to cite Pope Benedict XVI, “we ourselves have the final word”, “everything is simply our property” and “we use it for ourselves alone” (quoted in LS #6). As Francis perceives, the inadequacy of such anthropologies is inextricably connected to our failure to understand our true place within creation. This is why, for Pope Francis, ecology requires anthropology.

“Our current anthropological confusion, Pope Francis explains, has its roots in the fact that human beings ‘misunderstand themselves’ when they ‘fail to find their true place in this world’ (LS #115).”

Who or what determines our true “place” as human beings? For *Laudato Si'*, the answer to this question lies in God the Father, who in His loving tenderness “gives [every creature] its place in the world” (LS #77). This is because God’s love constitutes the “fundamental moving force in all created things” (ibid). Drawing on the Book of Wisdom (also known as the Wisdom of Solomon), Pope Francis affirms that every being belongs to God, who loves all things that He has created and endowed with life (Wisdom 11:24-26). This, Pope Francis claims, is “the basis of our conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect” (LS #89, emphasis added). To be “part of the universe is to have been lovingly “called into being” by God the Father.

While others may contend that humanity’s connectedness to

the rest of the world results from loveless physical processes, Pope Francis cites his previous apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), to stress that God, through His creative love, “has joined us so closely to the world that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement” (EG #215; cited in LS #89). In his encyclical sequel to *Laudato Si'*, *Laudate Deum* (2023), Pope Francis recalls this description of humanity’s place-in-relation to other creatures and insists that our “anthropocentrism” must therefore be “situated” (*locatum*) within the wider “family” of God’s creation (LD #67).

In locating humanity’s place with reference to the divine love which animates all of creation, Pope Francis is not of course unique. As *Laudato Si'* points out, this theological vision was poetically expressed by the medieval theologian Dante Alighieri in his description of “the love which moves the sun and the stars” (Dante, *Paradiso*, Canto XXXIII; quoted in LS #77). What are the implications of this theology for the human being’s “place” in the world? In his concluding prayer of the encyclical, “in union with creation”, Pope Francis petitions God with a potential echo of Saint Francis’ famous Prayer for believers to become “instruments” of God’s peace:

God of love, show us our place in this world
as channels [*instrumenta*] of your love [*affectus*]
for all the creatures of this earth.

Through God’s love, human beings are inextricably connected to the sun and other stars – which are *themselves* moved by the love of God. As creatures made in the image of God (*imago Dei*), moreover, human beings are called to be instruments of God’s will; that is, to be “channels” of God’s love towards themselves and the rest of His creation.

As the contributions to this *Nathaniel Report* commemorating *Laudato Si'*’s 10th year highlight, our environment today faces many challenges – from artificial intelligence, to the undermining of environmental stewardship by politically partisan understandings of personal “property”, “security” and “freedom”. In such contexts, we maintain that Pope Francis’ encyclical, together with the wider teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, continues to provide us with an ecology and anthropology that can itself only be understood with reference to a *theology* of God’s love in creation.

Dr Greg Marcar is a Senior Researcher at the Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics – Te Kupenga.

The Joyful and Troubling *Laudato Si'*

Prof David Tombs

Laudato Si': On care for our common home is a landmark statement in public theology. It calls the church, and wider society, to attend to the ecological and ethical challenges of our global environmental crisis with a message that Pope Francis describes as both “joyful and troubling” (LS #246).

Whilst this message is firmly rooted in Catholic theology and Catholic social teaching, Francis crafted it with such skill and care that it has been recognised and affirmed by church leaders in many denominations. It has served for the last decade as a *de facto* ecumenical statement on the urgency of the climate crisis and has been a precious gift to the whole global church.

One feature that has been noticed and discussed is that Francis wishes to avoid a false binary between care for creation and care for the poor. As he puts it, “[w]e are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental.”

The Encyclical’s tenth anniversary offers an opportunity to revisit the message and for churches to re-commit to its call. One feature that has been noticed and discussed is that Francis wishes to avoid a false binary between care for creation and care for the poor. As he puts it, “[w]e are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental” (LS #139). A solution to the environmental problem cannot come at the expense of the poor.

Pope Francis credits Saint Francis as his guide and inspiration for this integral ecology (LS #11). Pope Francis writes that “[h]e shows us just how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace” (LS #10). The influence of Latin American liberation theology is probably an additional factor. The distinctive “Theology of the People”, that developed in Argentina after Vatican II, may also have had a role. Francis did not attend Vatican II, but as Rudolf von Sinner has observed, he took its teaching on “the People of God” especially to heart. The connection between the protection of the environment and the protection of people – and above all, the protection of the poor – is central to the message.

Another intersectional connection which is perhaps less prominent but no less important in the text is the link between environmental violence and family violence. This strand has not had as much attention, yet it is signalled from the very first lines.

The Encyclical subtitle “On care for our common home” makes the connection clear. The household, or *oikos* in Greek, is one of the root words for “ecological”. Francis frames the environmental problem as a problem that impacts on everyone,

since we are metaphorically all living in the same house. The word, *oikoumene*, from which “ecumenical” is derived, refers to the household of the whole world.

The recognition of the earth as sister and mother in a common home thereby connects violence the earth to violence against sister and mother.

The Encyclical is addressed to environmental violence rather than other forms of family violence but explicit connections to family violence are made in several places. For example, in the first paragraph, Francis cites the famous “Canticle of Creatures” written by Francis of Assisi in 1225. The Encyclical’s opening words and title, “Laudato Si’, mi’ Signore” – “Praise be to you, my Lord”, are taken from the canticle. Francis explains:

In the words of this beautiful canticle, Saint Francis of Assisi reminds us that our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us. (LS #2)

In the next paragraph Francis makes clear that there is violence in this household.

This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. (LS #2)

The sister who now cries out, “because of the harm we have inflicted”, is a reminder of King David’s daughter, Tamar, raped by her brother Amnon. In 2 Samuel 13:19, Tamar is said to “cry aloud” following her abuse. The image brings home the level of violence the earth has experienced, she “groans in travail” (Romans 8:22).

The recognition of the earth as sister and mother in a common home thereby connects violence towards the earth with violence against sister and mother. This allows Francis to signal an additional message on his concern for family violence whilst keeping his primary focus firmly on environmental challenges.

On the tenth anniversary of publication, the Encyclical remains an extraordinary achievement that continues to repay careful study. The diagnosis of the environmental crisis as an existential crisis is as true now as it was ten years ago. The way that Francis connects these issues with poverty and with other forms of violence – including family violence – has much to teach the global church today.

Prof David Tombs is the Howard Paterson Professor of Theology and Public Issues at the University of Otago.

Honouring Pope Francis' Call to Action

Prof Jim McAloon

Laudato Si' is the most important social encyclical since Pope John's 1963 *Pacem in Terris* (*Peace on Earth*) and, as Francis said, both were written in response to grave concerns about the future of humanity and of the planet. The threat of nuclear war and of ecological collapse both arise from misused power and misused technology.

In 2015, I was a detached but interested observer of the church but was feeling decidedly positive about Pope Francis. As it became known that the pope was working on an "environmental encyclical", I was anticipating something important. I downloaded it as soon as it was available and read it on the train.

It is a compelling document, one for which I felt I had been waiting 30 years. The language and style are engaging, sometimes direct, sometimes almost lyrical. The opening lines, however, are stark. The earth is our "sister", and

"now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her. We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life." (LS #2)

A number of things struck me then and remain with me. One was how often Francis cited other bishops, especially bishops' conferences. He also shows how his predecessors, at least since Paul VI, became increasingly concerned about the environmental damage done by unbridled "growth", and reaffirmed the point that the goods of the earth belong to all people. There is a sense of collective wisdom.

Laudato Si' has a good deal to say about the climate crisis. One of the points Francis makes is that the consequences of heatwaves, droughts, floods, storms and rising sea levels are being and will largely be borne by those who did little to create the problem.

Francis reflects on the crisis of biodiversity, and how human induced extinction means "thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right." (LS #33) After writing at length on the seriousness of the situation, Francis refers to acts by individuals and groups of care for creation. "For all our limitations, gestures of generosity, solidarity and care cannot but well up within us, since we were made for love." (LS #58)

Laudato Si' has a good deal to say about the climate crisis. One of the points Francis makes is that the consequences of heatwaves, droughts, floods, storms and rising sea levels are being and will largely be borne by those who did little to create the problem. Wealthy nations and wealthy or

comfortable individuals can often insulate themselves from the consequences of their actions.

Francis also writes about the importance of making cities liveable. This is about social justice as well as environmental justice; a theme throughout the encyclical is how closely related poverty and ecological crisis are. The "cry of the earth and the cry of the poor" both reflect unbridled capitalism, the pursuit of economic growth at all costs and the accumulation of as much material wealth as possible, with no thought for our neighbour, future generations, or the planet itself. This is all based on the illusion of limitless resources, and of the technocratic paradigm – that technology can fix everything. One absurd expression of that is the delusion that establishing human colonies on Mars is the solution to Earth's ecological crisis.

The other thing that struck me the first time I read *Laudato Si'* was how much it had in common with other writing and thinking on ecology. I thought in particular of the work of American environmental historian, Donald Worster, whose essays are infused with the same moral passion. The New Zealand environmental historian, Catherine Knight, is another example. Naturally, many people who share the concerns expressed in *Laudato Si'* do so within other frames of reference than Catholic social teaching, and I think of friends whose lives and values are all about living respectfully with creation and about refusing endless accumulation and "growth". On one level, I almost thought that the church is coming to the party a bit late. Perhaps not, but Francis made care for creation a fundamental theme of his papacy.

In 2023, Francis issued a follow-up document, *Laudate Deum*. Shorter than *Laudato Si'*, it strikes a tone of frustration. Francis seemed to be asking if anyone had been listening. Well might he have wondered. CO₂ levels measured at Baring Head, near Wellington, continue to rise. "Despite all attempts to deny, conceal, gloss over or relativise the issue, the signs of climate change are here and increasingly evident" (LD #5). Pope Francis encouraged the efforts of households and communities to live more responsibly. Nevertheless, while everything helps, he also said, "it is necessary to be honest and recognise that the most effective solutions will not come from individual efforts alone, but above all from major political decisions on the national and international level". (LD #69)

In the wake of the recent landmark ruling of the International Court of Justice that States are legally obliged to prevent harms caused by the climate crisis, let us all re-commit to whatever political means we can to lobby our politicians in Aotearoa to step up to the mark.

Prof Jim McAloon is a Professor of History at Victoria University of Wellington and current chair of the Wellington Archdiocese Ecology, Justice and Peace Commission.

Economy Unplugged: The Link Between Integral Ecology and Economics

Adrienne Gallie

Ten years ago, through the groundbreaking encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis called on every person to develop a loving awareness of this home we share with a myriad of living things and to act on the values we hold dear (LS #220). Despite a growing disregard for the place we call home, there was hope that humanity would begin to see more vividly our “connection” (LS #5, #42, #220, #234, #240) to every other inhabitant of our common home and to integrate our connectedness in tangible ways.

As the years passed, the promise of *Laudato Si'* did not translate into action by those who have the power and authority to deliver it. Eight years later, in 2023, Pope Francis called out the wilful lack of progress on global climate agreements in the Apostolic Exhortation, *Laudate Deum*. In this letter, Francis insightfully names “the economy and the way we conceive it...” as a fundamental issue in the care for our common home (LD #31).

Addressing all people of good will on the climate crisis, Pope Francis adopts a different tone in *Laudate Deum*: one of exasperation and impatience. In particular, he calls on those with wealth to take responsibility for ensuring progress is made toward our common goal, urging them to direct their abundant gifts towards global problems and social issues. He notes “... that the most effective solutions will not come from individual efforts alone, but above all from major political decisions on the national and international level.” (LD #69)

Holding fast to GDP as the singular measure of success of our societies is inadequate and it was never intended for this purpose.

Integral ecology is a key concept in *Laudato Si'*, linking ethical and spiritual concepts as well emphasising the connection between ecology and economy; their shared etymological connection to the Greek notion of *oikos* (translated as home/household/family) urges us to adopt a holistic approach to the way we organise our lives and provide for one another. Crucially, we must be clear about the differences between running our own household finances and the larger scale task of good government to ensure the equitable distribution and application of goods and gifts derived in part from good taxation and future-oriented borrowing.

Renowned economists Dr Marianna Mazzucato and Dr Tim Jackson offer important insights into these differences. Mazzucato warns us “This whole notion that you run government like you run a household...is a complete myth.” Jackson notes that “Government finance is not the same as household finance. The budgetary rules that apply to households (and to a lesser extent to firms) don't apply in anything like the same way to governments.”

In Aotearoa New Zealand, when delivering the 2018 Budget, then Finance Minister Hon Grant Robertson wanted “New

Zealand to be a place where everyone gets a fair go, and where we show kindness and understanding to one another”. He added it would be the last time the budget would be delivered using Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a sole indicator of economic success. The Budget to be delivered in 2019 would be the beginning of a new era where the four capitals – economic, natural, human and social – will be used to gauge the material wellbeing of our country, the environment we inhabit and all who live here.

Holding fast to GDP as the singular measure of success of our societies is inadequate and it was never intended for this purpose. Today, many economic models emerging around the world – including Economy of the Common Good, Circular Economy, and Post Growth Economy – posit wellbeing as the true barometer. In the Aotearoa hub of the global *Wellbeing Economy Alliance*, economist Dr Paul Dalziel makes the case for high economic growth not being the same thing as a strong economy, while Gareth Hughes, Director of *WEALL Aotearoa*, asks the question: “Is more economic growth the answer to what ails us?” With their emphasis on principles such as human dignity, social justice and environmental sustainability, these alternative metrics for human prosperity exhibit an alignment with Catholic Social Teaching.

In the 2022 book, *Cathonomics*, Dr Anthony Annett, former IMF economist and now Climate Change and Sustainable Development Advisor, insists Catholic Social Teaching principles provide a thoroughly worked out framework for a wellbeing economy today. His basic contention is that neoliberalism inculcates and amplifies the “wrong” values and that it is time to try something different.

It is not enough to recall the pivotal letters, *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*, written by a much-loved Pope, no longer physically among us. We must embrace his legacy by moving from the TINA (there is no alternative) catch cry of Thatcherism to embracing TAPA (there are plenty of alternatives). To quote the statistician and economist, Ernst Friedrich Schumacher: “Can we rely on it that a ‘turning around’ will be accomplished by enough people quickly enough to save the modern world? ... The answer ‘Yes’ would lead to complacency, the answer ‘No’ to despair. It is desirable to leave these perplexities behind and get down to work.”

So what are we waiting for?

Adrienne Gallie is a Sister of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. She is a member of the SOSJ Laudato Si' Action Plan Team, Convenor of the Integral Ecology Committee of the Wellington Archdiocesan EJP Commission and supporter of the Wellbeing Economy Alliance, Aotearoa. Adrienne enjoys knitting and being near and in water.

Economy and Ecology: *Laudato Si'* and the “Throwaway” Culture

Rev Dr Alfred Tong

A recent liturgical gathering at a Wellington urban landfill, commemorating the 10th anniversary of *Laudato Si'* (LS), highlighted the physical closeness of our landfill and its plume to the natural environment. While standing and praying amidst the rubbish around the refuse transfer pit, it was sobering to witness native pukeko foraging metres away amongst the waste, all against a backdrop of the stream and native bush that adorns Spicer Park and nearby Colonial Knob along with unchecked views of Porirua Harbour and the sea beyond.

When governments delegate responsibility for resource management largely to businesses themselves, there's a significant risk that unelected corporations will favour their own self-interests and short-term profits...

Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* critically examines the connection between unchecked capitalism and economic growth, with a particular focus on the link between pollution and waste and a pervasive “throwaway culture” which affects the entire planet. (LS #22) This culture is characterised by an economic system that prioritises increased productivity, job creation, and a rise in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as indicators of national wealth. The system both feeds off, and further feeds, an insatiable consumerism, driven by marketing that encourages a constant desire for the “next best thing”.

When governments delegate responsibility for resource management largely to businesses themselves, there's a significant risk that unelected corporations will favour their own self-interests and short-term profits in the pursuit of increased production and reduced costs, along with a disregard for sustainable resource management.

At the same time, LS notes the “rise of a false or superficial ecology which bolsters complacency and a cheerful recklessness” – an attitude of evasiveness that ultimately “serves as a licence to carry on with our present lifestyles”. (LS #59)

The Reality of a “Use and Dispose” Mentality

Our modern approach to manufactured goods often reflects a “use and dispose” mentality. Broken or unwanted items are simply discarded, destined for landfills. This practice extends to “waste colonisation,” a term coined in 1989 that refers to where refuse and recycling materials are sent to developing countries with inadequate waste management infrastructure. This “out of sight, out of mind” attitude is alarmingly common.

The recent Right to Repair (Consumer Guarantees Act) Amendment Bill in New Zealand aims to address the lack of manufacturer obligations regarding product stewardship, thereby seeking to create a countermovement. This proposed

legislation seeks to legally bind manufacturers to offer repair services and make parts available to consumers, providing an alternative to simply replacing a product due to a lack of parts or repair options.

The “Right to Repair” movement underscores the unsustainability of a one-way, “throwaway” consumerism model. Consumer products, such as plastics from fossil fuels and batteries from lithium, are derived from natural resources that took millions of years to form. Unregulated exploitation of these finite resources cannot genuinely be considered “economic growth”.

Many businesses also employ tactics like “planned obsolescence” to maintain market dominance. For instance, Microsoft Windows 10 will become obsolete by October 2025 due to the cessation of security updates. This forces consumers to replace their computers with devices capable of running Windows 11, leading to an increased volume of electronic waste.

Laudato Si' and Indigenous Communities

Laudato Si' emphasises that “it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions” (LS #146). The current consumer and economic systems, where goods are designed for a short lifespan and quickly discarded, show little care (*kaitiakitanga*) for the products of human work as valuable gifts from God – as “fruit of the Earth and work of human hands”. This approach prevents these fruits from being shared and benefiting everyone, as *Laudato Si'* emphasises.

Looked at through an indigenous lens, in Aotearoa New Zealand the widespread presence of plastic waste (sometimes referred to as *kiriho* – new skin) has had a demonstrably negative impact on sovereign Māori stewardship rights. Instead of fostering indigenous knowledge (*mātauranga Māori*) in the interests of environmental care, modern consumerism has introduced waste products into the environment that have harmed critical social and environmental connections. Traditional seafood (*kaimoana*), for example, is now at risk of microplastic pollution.

Concluding Thoughts

The fundamental principle that “matter and energy is never gained or destroyed” is a basic tenet of physical sciences. Natural cycles, like the rock and water cycles, are circular processes that ensure no part of the finite system is isolated or depleted. “Sister Earth”, as described in *Laudato Si'*, is a “household” that ensures “balance and fairness” for everyone's relationships – with others and with the land – (LS #71) and “who sustains and governs us” (LS #1). The present model of unregulated profit-making simply shifts finite natural resources

Continued on page 14

Ten Years on, the Challenge in *Laudato Si'* is More Urgent

Rev John Howell

From the publication of the book "Limits to Growth" (1972) to the establishment of the *Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (IPCC) in 1998, the scientific community has extensively researched climate change and its consequences for our planet. The conclusion which propelled the 2015 Paris Agreement was based on evidence that the planet was heating – the so-called greenhouse effect – due to human-induced actions and that extreme events are increasingly likely to cause great harm.

A recent report from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) is bleak in its outlook regarding the economic and social upheavals from future extreme weather events. Human-induced climate change reached new heights in 2024, with predictions that some of the consequences will be irreversible over hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Key points from the recent WMO report are:

- Atmospheric concentrations of carbon dioxide are at the highest levels in the last 800,000 years.
- Globally, each of the past ten years were, individually, the ten warmest years on record.
- Each of the past eight years has set a record for ocean heat content.
- The 18 lowest Arctic sea-ice extents on record were all in the past 18 years.
- The three lowest Antarctic ice extents were in the past three years.
- The largest three-year loss of glacier mass on record occurred in the past three years.
- The rate of sea level rise has doubled since satellite measurements began.

I regard the WMO and the IPCC as modern-day prophets, warning us about the consequences of our actions.

These prophets are being ignored by governments around the world. In the United States, the current president is not only a climate denier but has taken to dismantling many of the science and climate research institutions, precluding informed debate or scientific analysis of his policies. His political view that the economy takes priority is a short-term one.

Since the Pope's 2015 encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'*, the current New Zealand government is among those nations undermining the promises and targets it committed to under the Paris Agreement.

The title of Pope Francis letter, "On Care for our Common Home" (2015) is instructive, emphasising that our planet is a shared home. Considering this, we need to ask: Can we maintain both a national and international perspective? To shift from perceiving the piece of land we inhabit as belonging to one particular people to seeing the planet as our shared home is a big ask, but one clearly identified by Pope Francis:

The urgent challenge to protect our common home

includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for we know that things can change ... to work together in building our common home. (LS #13)

As belonging confers identity for both individuals and groups, the required shift in perception poses a significant challenge for many. The question arises: To what extent are our religious traditions capable of widening our cultural and moral horizons rather than trapping us in some form of religious exclusivism? Put otherwise, this is a question about the make-up and identity of those within religious groupings who regard themselves as the "chosen", and the extent to which adherents can adopt an inclusive approach based on the common humanity of all; the idea that we are people partnering in this planetary home with others no matter our religious affiliation?

The last major European conflict where religion was the primary driver was the Thirty Years' War (1618-48). It was resolved by the Treaty of Westphalia which ultimately laid the foundations for the modern nation state. After 1648, people increasingly came to see themselves as subject, first and foremost, to the laws and edicts of their respective state authority, rather than a religious or other secular authority.

A consequence of the development of the nation state was national exclusivism, the American exclusivism of MAGA being a contemporary example of this.

Within religion there are themes that can challenge us to rise above national exclusivism.

Within Christianity, a universal view is found in Psalm 148, as well as in Micah 4 which allows foreign nations to partner with the chosen. Reflection on the Pentecost highlights how each person hears the same God in their own language (Acts 2:1-11). Similarly, the Book of Revelation expands the prophet Ezekiel's vision (Chapter 47) to draw in all nations (21:24-6).

Ten years on, the insights from *Laudato Si'* remain salient while having a heightened urgency: "It is foreseeable that, once certain resources have been depleted, the scene will be set for new wars." (LS #57) Critically, and unfortunately, the "problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations." (LS #53)

Within our religion and history there are strands hindering the necessary vision of a common home. Equally, there are strands capable of lifting us above nationalism and myopic self-interest to a deeper love of all our neighbours and all creation. We are all in this together.

Rev John Howell is a retired Presbyterian Minister living in Ngaio, Wellington.

Stewarding Creation in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

Julianne Hickey

This morning, like millions of others, I asked Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help me write. In seconds, electricity coursed through vast data centres, processors hummed with artificial thought, and carbon entered the atmosphere. My simple query joined a torrent consuming 10–50 times more energy than a traditional Google search. In this moment of technological convenience, I found myself at the heart of a profound moral question: How do we faithfully steward creation when our tools themselves threaten the very planet we're called to protect?

This personal crossroads reveals the deeper challenge facing every person of faith today. Our relationship with artificial intelligence is not merely about efficiency or innovation – it fundamentally concerns how we understand our identity as bearers of the *Imago Dei* and our vocation as stewards of God's creation.

The Sacred Dignity of Human Choice

Made in God's image and likeness, we possess a unique capacity for moral reasoning that no algorithm can replicate. This divine imprint grants us both the privilege and responsibility to shape technology's impact on creation. When Pope Leo XIII wrote *Rerum Novarum*, he recognised that individual workers' choices about labour and dignity shaped entire societies. Today, our AI decisions carry similar moral weight – their accumulation having a collective impact that can heal or harm our common home.

The Vatican's recent document Antiqua et Nova speaks directly to our digital age, calling for "human-centred AI" that serves genuine human needs.

Consider the stark reality: training GPT-3 produced roughly 552 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent, equal to 123 petrol cars driven for a year. Meanwhile, Microsoft's AI for Earth programme has enabled scientists to track over 100,000 species through camera traps, revolutionising conservation. This paradox illustrates our predicament: the same technology that threatens creation also offers tools for protecting it.

Wisdom from our Living Tradition

In 1965, Pope Paul VI's *Gaudium et Spes* taught that true progress serves human development, not just technological gain. Fifty years later, Pope Francis' *Laudato Si'* deepened this with the concept of *integral ecology* – the insight that environmental, social, and spiritual life are inseparably linked. AI systems that reduce creation to data and ignore human and spiritual relationships miss the heart of authentic stewardship.

The Vatican's recent document *Antiqua et Nova* speaks directly to our digital age, calling for "human-centred AI" that serves

genuine human needs. This guidance challenges us to discern whether our AI use genuinely serves creation care or provides a mere illusion of environmental action whilst perpetuating unsustainable patterns.

The *Imago Dei* and a Call to Daily Transformation

Living faithfully with AI requires constant discernment, but its very complexity can empower us to become more thoughtful moral agents. Before engaging AI, we can ask: does this serve human need or merely convenience? Will it strengthen community wisdom or replace human insight? How does this choice reflect my identity as *Imago Dei*?

As bearers of God's image, we hold real power to shape AI's direction. Catholic professionals in tech can advocate for renewable-powered data centres, design algorithms that prioritise sustainability, and ensure AI serves human dignity. Already, companies like Google have pledged carbon-neutral data centres by 2030, partly due to moral pressure from employees and consumers.

We alone possess integrated consciousness that experiences wonder at creation, feels reverence for living beings, and senses the interconnectedness that moves us to protect what we love.

Local communities can also lead through conscious choices: supporting businesses using sustainable AI, investing in creation-focused companies, and advocating for environmental assessments of large AI systems. When parishes choose renewable energy, schools teach ethics alongside digital skills, and families model mindful tech use, we collectively shape the future in a way that befits the dignity of all creation.

Preserving what Algorithms cannot Touch

Our greatest contribution may be preserving what AI fundamentally cannot replicate: the mystery of being created in God's image. We alone possess integrated consciousness that experiences wonder at creation, feels reverence for living beings, and senses the interconnectedness that moves us to protect what we love.

Consider what happens when you step outside and breathe deeply. Your body processes oxygen, your mind registers beauty, your spirit senses connection to something greater. This embodied, ensouled experience cannot be digitised, optimised, or automated. It remains irreplaceably human, irreplaceably sacred – and essential for authentic environmental stewardship.

Continued on page 14

Laudato Si': A Call to a New Way of Thinking

Dr Petrus Simons

Introduction

Laudato Si' (2015) addresses issues such as climate warming, dwindling biodiversity, environmental degradation, and extreme poverty pushing thousands of migrants into attempting perilous journeys towards a better life.

It has stimulated thought and action amongst Catholics and other Christians, as well as non-Christians. Yet, the problems it identifies keep worsening.

The latest Generative Artificial Intelligence technological advances, such as ChatGPT, require so much energy that the corporations running them are investing in nuclear power plants to provide it.

At the heart of Pope Francis' diagnosis is the human obsession to make money by applying science to technology, which he calls the technocratic paradigm.

This reflection will offer an outline of the technocratic paradigm, followed by Francis' alternative vision for an integrated ecology.

The Technocratic Paradigm

In his 1950s book, *The end of the modern world*, Romano Guardini analysed the effects of mass-consumption, mass communication and mass-marketing on people. He argues that we are inclined to accept whatever new technologies come along, adapt our way of living to them and consume their products, *regardless* of any destructive environmental effects, provided they yield economic growth and profits.

In *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis sketches two extreme characteristics of this technocratic paradigm:

- a. Ecological problems will solve themselves by the application of new technology and without any need for ethical considerations or deep change; (LS #60, 109)
- b. People are a threat to the system because they and their interventions jeopardize the global ecosystem. The growth of the world population should be reduced, therefore (LS #60).

The technocratic paradigm rules our daily lives through a dynamic and complex interplay between science, technology and economics.

Over many years, the Christian philosopher Egbert Schuurman has been drawing attention to this dominant but problematic paradigm, calling it "technicism": a way of trying to master all problems using scientific technology.

Schuurman identifies its components as:

a. Science

Contemporary science is not based upon the multidimensional highly interrelated reality we are part of. Rather, scientists abstract a particular function from a pattern of functions (biotic, economic, physical, social etc.) by abstracting it from all its usual connections to analyse it by experiments and other

methods, aiming to find out the laws that apply to it. They are after universal, enduring, logically coherent knowledge.

b. Technology

The universal knowledge science obtains is projected into the development of new technologies, so that they will be functional and universal, working as much as possible by automation. This is evident from the designs of our computers, aero-planes, cars, tractors etc. Everything needed to construct and operate them are objects. Materials produced display the same properties as technology. Plastics and many other so called "forever chemicals", for instance, are enduring and multifunctional. Unfortunately, they are also very harmful to human health and the environment.

c. Economics

We seek prosperity by applying technology to stimulate economic growth. People and the environment are becoming subordinate to the working of the technological-economic system. Less developed countries supply the necessary precious materials at the expense of their agriculture and resources, leading to migration and conflicts. In 2018, the United Nations estimated that during the preceding 60 years, 40% of conflicts involved natural resources. In 2020, 3.6% of the world's population were migrants (281 million).

This one-eyed drive to maximise economic growth ignores pollution and climate warming, unless required by (often ineffective) government regulations.

It is humbling to realise that minerals, fungi, plants and animals are all subjects in their own rights. They serve us daily, sustaining our life, and providing us with all we need.

Integral Ecology

Francis' alternative to the technocratic paradigm described above is based on his view that everything in the cosmos is related to everything else.

It is humbling to realise that minerals, fungi, plants and animals are all subjects in their own rights. They serve us daily, sustaining our life, and providing us with all we need. We should appreciate them rather than just exploiting them as objects for our material ends.

Our religious liturgical traditions remind us that water, oil, bread and wine are indispensable to the administration of the sacraments. "God himself became man and gave himself as food for his creatures" (LS #236).

In an integral ecology, humans, created in God's image, should reflect our Lord's love and blessing in all they do for all people, whoever or whatever they are, and for all God's creatures. We do not become free by maximising our consumption. We should

Continued on page 14

“Be good today, but better tomorrow”: A Mercy Perspective

Natasha Watson

Guided by a spirit of mercy, justice and love and the vision of Catherine McAuley, *Whānau Mercy Ministries* seeks to live out the Mercy charism in Aotearoa today, serving those in greatest need. We believe that our Mercy tradition can and must speak into the ecological crisis, one of the greatest issues of our time.

It has been over a decade since Pope Francis, in his encyclical *Laudato Si'* (2015), encouraged us all “to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it” (LS #19).

Catherine McAuley, the founder of the Sisters of Mercy, once said, “The simplest and most practical lesson I know ... is to resolve to be good today, but better tomorrow.”

As people who have taken up the mantle of Catherine McAuley to be mercy to our world today, we know that it is not enough to just keep discussing issues like environmental and social justice. We must make action central to our efforts. The use of resources today, without regard for tomorrow, is totally opposed to Catherine’s simple practical lesson and Pope Francis’ call to discover what we can do.

Mercy is demonstrated through action rooted in compassion, justice, and care for others. As highlighted in *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis emphasised that true ecological approaches must also address social justice, integrating environmental concerns with the needs of both the earth and the poor. Importantly, addressing social justice should not be an afterthought; it must be at the heart of any genuine effort to protect both people and the environment (LS #49).

Pope Francis urges us to consider the smallest daily actions that counter consumerism and waste. Even minor changes, when intentional, add up and help build a better world.

To “resolve to be good today” requires us to act as responsible stewards of what has been provided to us. We are intimately connected to earth’s biodiversity, not simply detached decision-makers. Recognising our role in this intricate web of life, it is crucial that we embrace co-existence with all living beings, fostering harmony and mutual respect for all life. For those of us living in Aotearoa, this approach aligns with te ao Māori values emphasising our connection to all life and Papatūānuku, particularly expressed in the principle of kaitiakitanga or stewardship of our resources.

To “be better tomorrow” calls us to ask how the world can be different. Global change can seem daunting, so we are asked to discover what we can do personally. Often that is in the form of simple daily gestures (LS #230). We should reflect on our culture of consumerism from easy online shops with known

dubious environmental credentials to the use of our vote in local and national elections. We might think nothing of a google search, but even that one, simple event uses up energy. The energy being expended is compounded by the growing use of AI, particularly AI used for purely entertainment purposes or as an add on to a search that no one has asked for.

We can be very intentional, taking the time to think about who will bear the brunt of our decision-making. We may be a step removed from our fellow citizens who don’t have the ability to carelessly consume – those who already suffer from the impact of our unthinking resource use. Pope Francis urges us to consider the smallest daily actions that counter consumerism and waste. Even minor changes, when intentional, add up and help build a better world.

We may not be able to influence world leaders, but we can ask:

- Are my recyclables ending up in landfill?
- How/where can we support closing the manufacturing loop by purchasing recycled products?
- Is our construction work minimising waste and promoting reuse?
- What meal can we make with food that must be used tonight?
- Is this flippant web search/purchase worth the energy expended?

These daily actions matter, and we must act urgently. This is the call to action.

The global ecological movement, guided by principles like those in *Laudato Si'* and mātauranga Māori, links environmental action with social justice. Inspired by Pope Francis’ vision, communities are reforestation, advocating for sustainable energy sources, and supporting policies that benefit both the environment and marginalised groups. These efforts, from grassroot initiatives to climate justice campaigns, highlight how small choices can have broad impacts.

Whether in the careful management of waste, the reclamation of traditional knowledge, or the global push for climate justice, we can begin to live out practical embodiments of mercy and solidarity. In this way, the spirit of the message, grounded in faith and care for the vulnerable, continues to animate and inspire the urgent work of ecological renewal.

This is a Mercy call to action to make an intentional effort to be good today and better tomorrow. A decade on from the release of *Laudato Si'*, that seems the least we should all be doing.

Natasha Watson is Pou Atawhai for Whānau Mercy Ministries (WMM). WMM is officially recognised by the Catholic Church to oversee ministries established by Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa Sisters of Mercy New Zealand. Independent from the congregation, WMM upholds the teaching, healing, and caring work of Jesus Christ, and is committed to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and following the traditions of the Ngā Whaea Atawhai o Aotearoa.

“...our friendship with God is always linked to particular places”

Dr Kathleen Rushton

Earlier this year, in which we celebrate the tenth anniversary of Pope Francis' landmark Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'* (LS), I was blessed to be the Denis Edward Visiting Scholar at the *Laudato Si'* Research Institute, Campion Hall, Oxford UK (February–April). In his landmark Encyclical Letter, which is a transformative call to for us to “care for our common home”, Francis wrote: “The entire material universe speaks of God’s love ... The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning ...” (LS #84). Among my many learnings is the significance of place.

While at the *Laudato Si'* Research Institute, I was with amazing people who were deeply aware that “everything is interconnected” (LS #137) and deeply committed to the notion of integral ecology (LS Chapter 4) which calls us to respond by hearing “both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor.” (LS #39). That said, at events such as seminars and a conference when the term, the Global South – what we call the Southern Hemisphere – was talked about, it was always in reference to Africa, South America and Asia. I attended one workshop at which the presenter, a USA-based cartographer (who works for the Vatican) presented “world maps” that did not feature the Pacific Ocean.

On such occasions, I drew attention to the fact that there was no awareness of the Pacific Ocean which extends over one-third of the surface of the planet and is the largest geographical feature on Earth. This “water continent”, where less than 2% of the combined land-sea is land, has over 20,000 islands which are the ancestral home of Pacific Islanders. Because of climate breakdown, this sea of islands is the most vulnerable region on Earth.

On this journey together, Francis further reminds us that “indigenous communities and their cultural traditions ... should be the principal dialogue partners” (LS #146).

My sense of my “particular” place is being further expanded. I am currently teaching an online Scripture course for the Pacific Regional Seminary, Suva, and have spent two weeks there to meet my students who are from Fiji, Federated States of Micronesia, Kiribati, New Caledonia and Samoa. This visit and my Oxford experience are raising questions for me as a Pākehā/Palangi Aotearoa New Zealand woman of the Pacific about how to address the issue of lack of knowledge about our region.

According to Luamanuvao Winnie Laban, former Assistant Vice-Chancellor (Pasifika) at Te Herenga Waka–Victoria University of Wellington, “in” and “of” are small words which have deep and subtle meaning. Aotearoa New Zealanders are *of* the Pacific. One can be *in* the Pacific and stand apart as an observer

or outsider. For Laban, being “of” the Pacific “gives a much greater sense of participation, of ownership, accountability and responsibility for actions taken.”

The silence in our parishes regarding *Laudato Si'* contrasts with it being highly regarded ecumenically and politically – notably, by former Prime Minister, Helen Clark, who attributed the success of COP21 to Pope Francis' decision to release this encyclical six months before that conference began. My Oxford experience has convinced me that we Catholic Aotearoa New Zealanders who are *of* the Pacific are called to: “A great cultural, spiritual and educational challenge [which] stands before us ... demand[ing] that we set out on the long path of renewal” (LS #202). On this journey together, Francis further reminds us that “indigenous communities and their cultural traditions ... should be the principal dialogue partners” (LS #146).

We can listen to Pacific voices in many ways. The Caritas State of the Environment for Oceania report series (2015–2021) gifted us with resources on five key issues affecting local communities: coastal erosion and sea level rise, food and water, extreme weather, offshore mining and drilling, and climate finance.

I was recently alerted to a Vatican News article (4 July), “Holy Father, we’re sinking.” Those words from a colleague in Tuvalu were received by Archbishop Jimenez, head of the Episcopal Conference of the Pacific (CEPAC) (by area the largest episcopal conference in the world) just before he met with Pope Leo XIV.

Parishes in Aotearoa could, in the context of reflection on the LS concluding prayers, raise awareness through, for example, two Doc Edge films now available online. *Yumi The Whole World* follows three University of the South Pacific law students who, in the face of rising seas in their homelands of Vanuatu, Fiji, and the Solomon Islands, led a historic campaign to bring climate justice to the International Court of Justice. The outcome is the recent ICJ ruling that states are obligated under international law to tackle climate change; failure to do so could open the door to reparations. In *A Promise*, Papuans in exile tell of their untold history when West Papua, while heading towards independence, was subverted by international and economic interests that led from occupation by the Netherlands to the current Indonesian occupation.

As the world remains silent, and while the islands of the Pacific remain invisible to so many, their resilience and hope in their “particular places” resonates with: “Let us sing as we go. May our struggles and our concern for this planet never take away the joy of our hope.” (LS #244)

Dr Kathleen Rushton (RSM) of Christ the Redeemer Parish, Ōtautahi Christchurch delights in researching John's Gospel.

The Regulatory Standards Bill seeks to improve the quality of legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand by offering a number of 'Principles of Responsible Regulation'. The principles are intended to provide a benchmark for good legislation. In the words of the Bill: "Where inconsistency is identified, the Bill requires a statement from the responsible Minister (or maker of secondary legislation where not a Minister) to briefly explain the reasons." The Bill passed its first reading on the 22 May 2025 and attracted a total of 22,821 submissions by the closure date, 23 June 2025, 88% of which were in opposition. The Select Committee Report is due on 22 November 2025.

Regulatory Standards Bill 2025

Submission to the Finance and Expenditure Committee

Staff of the Nathaniel Centre

We write to express our urgent concerns with the proposed Regulatory Standards Bill 2025 (hereafter, "RSB 2025" or "the Bill"). In this submission, we focus on two sets of issues with the "principles of responsible regulation": the Rule of Law and the Liberties of Personal Security and property.

The Rule of Law and Legal Equality:

The RSB 2025 affirms that "every person is equal before the law" (Section 8 (a) (iii)). While we too believe in this political principle, the nature of equality in "equal before the law" must not become confused. To be "equal" before the law is to be recognised as having a *parity of social and legal standing*; it is not to be *the same*. Nor does "equal before the law" mean that the law will necessarily impact all people to the same extent or in the same way. By itself, therefore, equality before the law is insufficient to ensure that all persons are able to enjoy the same fundamental rights and liberties (the content of which will be discussed further below). Equality before the law must therefore go hand-in-hand with a substantive conception of equality *under* the law.

Consistent with this understanding, we strongly critique the lack of meaningful local and indigenous consultation that the bill envisages. Far from safeguarding the "rule of law", the sidelining of local consultation in fact implicitly *undermines* the parity of social and legal standing that people within these communities should possess – precisely by virtue of being equal both "before" and under the law. In this context, we would like to draw particular attention to the importance of the Treaty of Waitangi for equality under the law in Aotearoa New Zealand. As both the legislature and judiciary has consistently affirmed, the relationship between Māori Iwi and particular natural entities "lies at the heart" of these communities' "spiritual and physical wellbeing" (Waikato River Settlement 2010), as well as directly implicating their "customary rights and responsibilities" and "consequently the expression of their *mana*" (Whanganui River Claims Settlement Act 2017).

Seen in this light, we would like to reiterate the Waitangi Tribunal's statement that "if the Regulatory Standards Act were enacted without meaningful consultation with Māori, it would constitute a breach of the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi, specifically the principles of partnership and active protection".

These principles of partnership and active protection – which, importantly, includes protection of the Whenua to which

Tangata Whenua belong – are not in tension with legal equality; we maintain that they are a *prerequisite* for this equality.

Personal Security, the Right to Property and the Environment:

Under its "principles of responsible regulation", the bill proposes that "legislation should not unduly diminish a person's liberty, personal security, freedom of choice or action, or right to own, use, and dispose of property, except as is necessary to provide for, or protect, any such liberty, freedom, or right of another person." (Section 8(b)). We acknowledge that the rights enumerated here – to liberty, personal security, and property – have been considered the "Absolute Rights of Individuals" under common law jurisprudence since at least William Blackstone's *Commentaries* in the eighteenth century (1765). The meaning, scope and relationship of these concepts, however, are in danger of misrepresentation under the proposed bill.

In particular, we would like to highlight the conception of a person's "personal security" that is implicitly being promoted by the Regulatory Standards Bill. In his *Commentaries*, Blackstone explains that the right to personal security "consists in a person's legal and uninterrupted enjoyment of his life, his limbs, his body, his health, and his reputation." For almost two centuries, therefore, the right to personal security has been understood to encompass far more than physical existence and material wealth. The right to personal security includes not only a person's mere life, but also his/her health, as well as non-material or communal goods such as reputation.

A similar point may be made with respect to a person's "right to property", which the proposed bill clearly prioritises. It should be recalled here that property is not an absolute or inherent right. Rather, as taught by political and legal philosophers from Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century to John Locke in the 17th century, a person's property should be owned and used in consideration of not only others' *rights*, but also their *needs*. In today's context, moreover, we submit that the needs of others to which the "right to property" remains conditioned includes the need for all to live in a healthy and sustainable environment.

Significantly, these reflections on personal security and the right to property align with current understandings of the international "right to life." Enshrined under Article 6 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) as well as other agreements to which New Zealand is a signatory,

the United Nations has upheld that the right to life is the “supreme right.” The right to life is supreme because it is the precondition for the enjoyment of all other rights. Increasingly, it has been recognised that the human right to life – and by implication, any meaningful concept of “personal security – necessitates consideration of the environment. By way of illustration, we would like to highlight the UN Human Rights Committee’s 2020 decision in *Ioane Teitiota v. New Zealand*. In this case, the UNHRC held that when changes to someone’s climatic environment present an “immanent” risk, this may constitute a violation of the affected person’s “right to life”.

On this basis, we submit that consideration of the environment and environmental health must be integral to any Regulatory

Standards Bill. By excluding this dimension of personal security and the human right to life, the proposed bill risks enormous harm to the natural resources of Aotearoa New Zealand and the communities who depend upon them.

Summary:

On the basis of these observations on “personal security”, the “right to life” and the rule of law – and with a particular view to local and indigenous communities – we believe that the Regulatory Standards Bill rests on inadequate legal or conceptual foundations. As a result, we submit that this Bill must, once again, be rejected.

Continued from page 7

from one place to another – and ultimately to landfills – without allowing “our Sister, Mother Earth” to rebalance its circular ecosystem.

Meanwhile, true economics, derived from *oikonomia* (management of a household), must involve more than simply using and discarding resources.

Ultimately, economic and ecological considerations are intertwined. They are two bows for the same fiddle. The notion that we can simply “throw away” waste is a myth.

Embracing a mindset of not acquiring what we do not need is crucial to undermining the culture of consumerism (with its characteristics of short-term gain and private interest) while ensuring sufficient resources for all.

Rev Dr Alfred Tong is a priest of the Archdiocese of Wellington. His PhD in Environmental Chemistry focused on the disposal of pharmaceutical wastes and their environmental impact.

Continued from page 9

Rising to our Calling

Living as faithful stewards in the AI age demands a careful discernment that has always characterised Catholic engagement with the world. We can harness AI’s power for creation care whilst preserving our essential humanity. We can use digital tools whilst never forgetting that environmental healing ultimately flows from human hearts transformed by encounters with the sacred.

This is a moment of extraordinary responsibility and opportunity. As *Imago Dei*, we possess both the dignity and the power to ensure that artificial intelligence serves authentic intelligence, that digital innovation supports rather than replaces contemplative wisdom, and that our technological

choices ultimately serve the flourishing of all creation.

The future of our common home depends not on our algorithms, but on our humanity, including our courage to let that humanity guide every choice we make. We are called to nothing less than becoming the generation that learns to wield unprecedented technological power with wisdom worthy of our divine calling.

Julianne Hickey is the former Director of Caritas Aotearoa New Zealand. She now leads Fambirai, helping people and organisations navigate the world of AI with skills, strategy, and heart – always putting humanity at the centre. This article was developed with the support of three AI tools: Magisterium.com, Claude Sonnet 4, and ChatGPT.

Continued from page 10

learn to “accept the limits imposed by reality” (LS #204), in “a liberating sobriety” (LS #223).

Francis stresses that the entire cosmos belongs to Christ, with references to John 1:1-18 and Col. 1:19,20 (LS #100). If we believe this from our heart, then, we will commit ourselves to overcoming the technocratic paradigm.

Conclusion

Laudato Si’ challenges us to revere life, to strive for justice and peace and to joyfully celebrate life in our common home. We are called to develop a “new way of thinking about human

beings, life, society and our relationship with nature” (LS #215), involving “simple daily gestures”, to break “the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness” (LS #230).

We are all called to seek a responsible way of using technology; to combat climate warming and restore the biosphere, rather than destroy it.

Dr Petrus Simons is a retired economist with a PhD in philosophy. He is a Lutheran member of the Roman Catholic-Lutheran Dialogue Commission.

Select Quotations from *Laudato Si'* and *Laudate Deum*

Laudato Si'

"The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor; she 'groans in travail' (Rom 8:22). We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7)" (Laudato Si' #2)

"Our world has a grave social debt towards the poor who lack access to drinking water, because they are denied the right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity." (Laudato Si' #30)

"Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right." (Laudato Si', #33)

"The entire material universe speaks of God's love, God's boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God." (Laudato Si', #84)

"The created things of this world are not free of ownership: 'For they are yours, O Lord, who love the living' (Wis 11:26). This is the basis of our conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect." (Laudato Si', #89)

"Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society." (Laudato Si', #91)

"Ecology studies the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop. This necessarily entails reflection and debate about the conditions required for the life and survival of society, and the honesty needed to question certain models of development, production and consumption. It cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected." (Laudato Si', #138)

"[I]t is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred

space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values." (Laudato Si', #146)

"No system can completely suppress our openness to what is good, true and beautiful, or our God-given ability to respond to his grace at work deep in our hearts. I appeal to everyone throughout the world not to forget this dignity which is ours. No one has the right to take it from us." (Laudato Si', #205)

"The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things ... The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures." (Laudato Si', #240)

"Eternal life will be a shared experience of awe, in which each creature, resplendently transfigured, will take its rightful place" (Laudato Si', #243)

Laudate Deum

"Some effects of the climate crisis are already irreversible, at least for several hundred years, such as the increase in the global temperature of the oceans, their acidification and the decrease of oxygen... This is one of the many signs that the other creatures of this world have stopped being our companions along the way and have become instead our victims." (Laudate Deum, #15)

"Artificial intelligence and the latest technological innovations start with the notion of a human being with no limits, whose abilities and possibilities can be infinitely expanded thanks to technology. In this way, the technocratic paradigm monstrously feeds upon itself." (Laudate Deum, #21)

"Contrary to this technocratic paradigm, we say that the world that surrounds us is not an object of exploitation, unbridled use and unlimited ambition." (Laudate Deum, #25)

"The Judaeo-Christian vision of the cosmos defends the unique and central value of the human being amid the marvellous concert of all God's creatures, but today we see ourselves forced to realize that it is only possible to sustain a 'situated anthropocentrism'. To recognize, in other words, that human life is incomprehensible and unsustainable without other creatures." (Laudate Deum, #67)

"We now know that creation can no longer be regarded as something separate from ourselves or as a mere setting that we live in. Our duty to protect human life and the biblical injunction to care for the earth which we share with the rest of God's creation are closely entwined." (Catholic Bishops of Aotearora New Zealand, Te Kahu o e Ora: A Consistent Ethic of Life, p.2)



The Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics

THE STORY BEHIND THE NAME

The red flowers of the pōhutukawa appear in December each year. At Cape Reinga on the northern tip of New Zealand there is a lone pōhutukawa, thought to be 800 years old. In Māori tradition the spirits of the dying travel to Cape Reinga where they slip down the roots of the sacred pōhutukawa into the sea, to journey back to their origin in Hawaiki.

Nathaniel Knoef was born on 12 December 1998, as the pōhutukawa flowers were beginning to appear. He died on 2 February 1999 as the same flowers faded, giving way to the seed from which new pōhutukawa would grow. At his birth Nathaniel was diagnosed with incurable health problems and in the few weeks of his life his parents faced many ethical issues associated with his care. Their story clearly highlighted the need ordinary people have for access to support in dealing with the growing number of ethical issues which surround the gift of life.

The naming of New Zealand's national Catholic Bioethics Centre in honour of Nathaniel is a sign of the Centre's commitment to those who are most vulnerable in the complex ethical situations which develop in their lives.

Thanks

The staff of the Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics wish to thank all their benefactors whose support has been instrumental in the establishment and continued work of the Centre. The Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics is supported by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference and also relies upon fees for its services, and individual donations for its continued operation and growth.

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