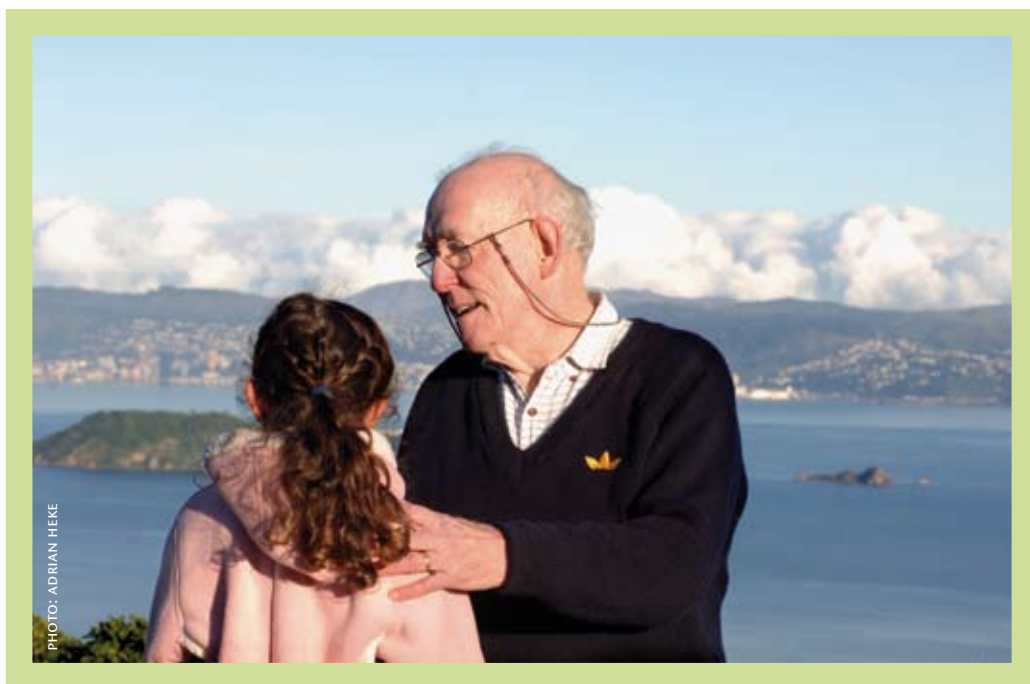


# Renew the face of the earth

## Environmental Justice

NUMBER ELEVEN IN THE CARITAS SOCIAL JUSTICE SERIES



**For Social Justice Week 2006**

**10 to 16 September**

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## Lord, send out your Spirit, and renew the face of the earth

Psalms 104:30

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## Foreword from the New Zealand Catholic Bishops



### Environmental Justice

A Statement from the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference  
for Social Justice Week 10-16 September 2006

*The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction."*

Pope Benedict XVI, Homily at Inaugural Mass, 2005

What does the commandment "Thou shall not kill" mean when twenty percent of the world's population consumes resources at a rate that robs poorer nations and future generations of what they need to survive?

What does it mean to respect life when 30,000 people die each day from poverty?

What does it mean to be stewards of the earth when up to half of all living species are expected to become extinct in the next 200 years?

Science and technology have brought many blessings to human existence. Over the last fifty years those blessings have included a greater capacity to meet basic human needs. But the benefits of these advances have been spread unjustly, often with an adverse effect upon the world's most vulnerable populations. The existence of extreme poverty and environmental destruction in our world are not natural forces, nor acts of God, but result from human behaviour. That behaviour is driven by values, priorities and decisions which do not see human life as a paramount concern.



*"The existence of extreme poverty and environmental destruction in our world are not natural forces, nor acts of God, but result from human behaviour."*

Our world is facing an ecological crisis, which could equally be called an economic crisis, or a poverty crisis. Its public face is the suffering of the poor and the degradation of our environment, at a time when accumulation of wealth and material goods has never occupied our attention more. That is why we see it primarily as a spiritual or moral crisis.

Climate scientists warn us that the decisions of this generation over the next twenty years will impact upon the future of humanity. For the peoples of the Pacific, climate change is already among the most urgent threats facing them. Rising temperatures and sea levels, and the greater intensity of storms and natural disasters, are already affecting the food and water supply for people on low-lying islands in different parts of the Pacific.

Long before these islands disappear into the sea, life on many Pacific Islands will become untenable. It is predicted that in the Pacific alone, there may be a million environmental refugees before the end of this century.

As in other parts of the world, those most suffering the consequences of climate change are those who have played the least part in contributing to it. People we may

never meet, as well as those who are not yet born, will benefit or suffer as a result of the decisions we make and take in New Zealand and in the rest of the developed world.

As Pope Benedict said in his inaugural homily: "The external deserts are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast." Protecting the environment involves moderating our desires to consume and own more, which create lifestyles that bring death to millions of other people. Consumerism, global environmental change and suffering in the developing world are inextricably linked.

At the personal level the suffering of others and the damage to our planet demand that we look closely at our own lifestyles. Individual acts of selfishness can create a society characterised by a desire for short term gain and immediate gratification over longer term needs and a wider view. In response, both individual and collective acts of selflessness are needed – of self sacrifice for the greater good, of self denial in the midst of convenient choices, of choosing simpler lifestyles in the midst of a consumer society.

*"Climate scientists warn us that the decisions of this generation over the next twenty years will impact upon the future of humanity. For the peoples of the Pacific, climate change is already among the most urgent threats facing them"*



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE



*“Our understanding that we are stewards of God’s creation, our solidarity with the poor, and our respect for the common good make the issue of environmental justice the responsibility of every person.”*

This does not mean abandoning the scientific and technological advances which have given us such great benefits. It means using them wisely, and in a thoughtful manner which reflects true solidarity with all the people of the earth.

Ultimately, this is a global problem requiring real global solutions. But individual Catholics, parishes, Catholic schools, religious communities and church organisations can play a big part by making different choices, such as using less energy or buying locally made goods which require less transportation. The world needs to reduce its carbon output by 80 percent, and some New Zealand households could achieve that overnight by simply changing the kind of car they drive. Avoiding water waste and the excess packaging are two simple steps which can be acted upon by individuals and households.

But vulnerable members of our own society – such as the elderly – have suffered previously during power crises by going without necessities such as warmth and light, and we have to work to ensure that the costs of any changes to our lifestyles are borne by those who can best afford them.

Our faith and our religious tradition have much to offer the world at this time, including the importance of simplicity, and of learning to give up some things that we want, so others may have what they need. Our understanding that we are stewards of God’s creation, our solidarity with the poor, and our respect for the common good make the issue of environmental justice the responsibility of every person.

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*Choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants.*

Deuteronomy 30:19

## Introduction

*“At the heart of the biblical tradition there lies the clear revelation of God: Choose life not death. Through God all life was created and continues to be created.”<sup>1</sup>*

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

Our Biblical and liturgical traditions are full of the wonder of life and of God’s creation. The Genesis account of creation echoes with the refrain that “God saw it was good.” According to our tradition, human beings were charged with the stewardship of the earth and all living creatures.

But at the start of the 21st century, we are waking up to the cost of human activity on the earth. Overuse of resources, pollution of the natural environment and the growing effects of climate change are changing the face of the earth. We are seeing the death of life in the extinction of species on a scale not previously experienced by humanity.

Environmental destruction has always harmed the poor more than the rich. The scale of today’s problems means that actions that seem harmless to people in one part of the globe are bringing harm to people they have never met in another part of the globe.

Increasingly our world is characterized by extremes of wealth and poverty, with millions lacking the essentials of life while a privileged minority often lead dissatisfied lives despite having access to an unprecedented abundance of products. The economic and social pressures that create these inequalities are also those that are wreaking havoc on the world’s environment.

The Catholic Church’s approach to environmental issues is unashamedly anthropocentric – seeing environmental issues through their effects on the lives of people. Caritas has been drawn into considering environmental issues through the suffering of people: through disasters resulting from environmental degradation, through increasing hardship as traditional food and water sources disappear, and through devastation of homes and livelihoods through pollution and industrial activities.

*“The integrity of the ecosystem within which human life exists is vital to our very survival, to the well-being of future generations, and to respect for the work of God”<sup>2</sup>*

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

1 New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference: *A Consistent Ethic of Life*, 1997

2 New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference: *A Consistent Ethic of Life*, 1997



*God is suffering because of the destruction of the environment. We've reached a standard of living based on the resources of the rest of the world, and the good Lord's not going to like that. I don't see anything happening unless we humbly admit we're having it too easy.*

Eric Ryan, Catholic environmentalist, Whangarei

The issues have been put firmly on the agenda by the experience in particular of our partners in the Pacific, our immediate neighbours. Their message is like that of an Old Testament prophet sent to warn that if we do not change our ways we face destruction. Climate change scientists also tell us that next twenty years will decide the future of humanity. Like those warned by the prophets, it is not too late. The situation requires repentance, change of heart and change of lifestyle, not just on a personal scale but on a global scale.

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference have explained that environmental concerns are part of the Consistent Ethic of Life, which weaves together as a single concern all life issues, from abortion and euthanasia to poverty, capital punishment, cultural diversity and care for the earth.

In the encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* Pope John Paul II outlined his belief that defending and promoting life, is a task that God entrusts to all people, calling us to be God's living image in the world.<sup>3</sup> Catholic Bishops of the Philippines, living closely with the effects of environmental degradation, were even more direct, calling it "the ultimate pro-life issue".<sup>4</sup>

We need to bring our spiritual and moral attention to the environmental problems that we are facing, because our society needs to generate the political will needed to make hard decisions. Our Catholic tradition brings to the struggle the recognition of our roles as stewards of God's creation, our solidarity with the poor, the habits of self-sacrifice for the greater good and a message that we need to aspire to be more, rather than to have more. It also charges us to act on both personal and structural levels.



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

*"A Consistent Ethic of Life must be promoted. This places the sacredness of creation and the need to protect and enhance all human life, and the life of our planet on which we depend, as a basic and central moral point of reference."*<sup>5</sup>

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

3 Pope John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, 1995

4 Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines: *What is happening to our beautiful land?*, 1988

5 New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference: *A Consistent Ethic of Life*, 1997



Some key principles of Catholic social teaching on environmental justice include:

**Stewardship:** We have a responsibility to care for the gifts God has given us. *“The Magisterium underscores human responsibility for the preservation of a sound and healthy environment for all.”*<sup>6</sup>

**Solidarity:** We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other transcend national, racial, economic and ideological differences. They also extend to future generations. *“Responsibility for the environment, the common heritage of humankind, extends not only to present needs but also to those of the future.”*<sup>7</sup>

**Common Good:** Individual rights are always experienced within the context of respecting the rights and responsibilities of all people. *“Care for the environment represents a challenge for all of humanity. It is a matter of a common and universal duty, that of respecting a common good.”*<sup>8</sup>

**Universal Destination of Goods:** The earth and all it produces is intended for every person. *“The goods of the earth were created by God to be used wisely by all. They must be shared equitably, in accordance with justice and charity.”*<sup>9</sup>

**The Precautionary Principle:** The Compendium of Catholic social doctrine refers to an important new principle of precaution, which is to be taken into account in making decisions concerning health and environmental risks in which scientific information is uncertain or scarce. *“Prudent policies, based on the precautionary principle, require that decisions be based on a comparison of the risks and benefits foreseen for the various possible alternatives, including the decision not to intervene.”*<sup>10</sup>



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

*“The future of humanity itself has become dependant on the wise choices made by the human family to ensure the flourishing in abundance of life, love and diversity. There must be continuing reflection on the value of life so that wise choices can be made.”*<sup>11</sup>

New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference

6 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (465), 2004

7 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (467), 2004

8 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (466), 2004

9 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (481), 2004

10 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (469), 2004

11 New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference: *A Consistent Ethic of Life*, 1997

## All creation rightly gives you praise

Preface to the Eucharistic prayer

### And God saw that it was good

*"The entire work of creation and redemption which God, Father and Son and Holy Spirit, continues to bring about, from the beginning to the end of the cosmos and of history, is summed up in every individual person."*<sup>12</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI

Catholic Biblical and liturgical traditions powerfully display our tradition of praise of the Creator through valuing creation. The Psalms are full of metaphors of the love between God and humanity shown and recognised through images of nature. *"The Lord is my shepherd...he makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters", "As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you O God."*

In our modern society, especially for city dwellers who are often removed from everyday encounters with nature, it is good to be reminded of the wonder and awe the Biblical writers found in contemplating God's creation, expressed in phrases such as *"Stand and consider the wondrous works of God!"*<sup>13</sup>

Australian theologian Denis Edwards says that the early Eucharistic prayers were based on Jewish prayer forms which always begin with a blessing of the gifts of creation. He describes Eucharist as the "living memory" of both creation and redemption, expressed in the Mass in phrases such as *"All life, all holiness comes from you"*. This imagery continues strongly through present day translations of the Catholic Mass, as well as in other liturgical traditions.<sup>14</sup>

The Creation story given in Genesis is one in which the world is created in beauty and balance, and in which humanity is given the role and responsibility of stewardship of the world. This is increasingly understood as being far more than old Biblical translations that described humanity having "dominion over the earth" or being told to "subdue the earth".



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

*"In deep silence, we allow the stories of creation, and the stories of God to inspire and affirm us. We are aware of God's sustaining presence. We marvel at the limitless vistas and beauty of the universe. We quietly identify what we feel about God's creation."*<sup>15</sup>

Fr Michael Gormly

12 Pope Benedict XVI, *Vespers of the First Sunday of Advent*, 2005

13 Job 37:14

14 Edwards, Denis: *Celebrating Eucharist in a Time of Global Climate Change*, Address to Catholic Earthcare Australia conference, November 2005

15 Gormly, Fr Michael: *Our quest for ecological integrity*, Catholic social justice series no.37, Australian Catholic Social Justice Council, 2000

*But ask the animals, and they will teach you;  
The birds of the air, and they will tell you;  
Ask the plants of the earth, and they will  
teach you;  
And the fish of the sea will declare to you:  
Who among all these does not know that the  
hand of the Lord has done this?  
In his hand is the life of every living thing,  
and the breath of every human being.*

Job 12:7-10



PHOTO: PAUL SORRELL

While the Christian tradition understands that God intended human beings to be part of the ongoing task of creation through our work, including cultivating the earth and using resources responsibly, as with other aspects of Catholic social teaching there is no absolute right to own or use the earth as we wish.

Pope John Paul II taught that human work is always based on “God’s prior and original gift of the things that are”<sup>16</sup>, warning that when people use the earth in an arbitrary way without respecting God’s purpose, they set themselves “in place of God, and end up provoking a rebellion on the part of nature, which is more tyrannised than governed.”<sup>17</sup>

Through Genesis, the Psalms, the liturgical traditions of many Christians, and Catholic social teaching, there is a constant message of the goodness of God’s creation, and of the attitude of humility and awe that people have when they contemplate both the enormity of the universe and the detail of micro-organisms.

Catholic social teaching on the environment is concerned with the wellbeing of both the planet and its people. It is about finding ways to live that sustain human life and that of all living creatures without plundering the natural environment and destroying what we need to survive.

It is about valuing life, including the diversity of God’s creation, but it is more than conservationism, such as a narrow focus on saving particular species. It is about enjoying the natural beauty of the earth, but it is more than simply preserving national parks or reserves where nature is treated with veneration, while we continue to live as we wish in different places and parts of our lives.

It is about valuing the natural environment for its own sake – for appreciating the beauty and worth of, for example, a tree, without thinking of it only as potential fuel for a fire. But it is about more than preserving the natural environment as if human beings were intruders, or pollution that should not be allowed.

For large numbers of people in New Zealand the earth has become so taken for granted that we no longer see it. For many the starting point for protecting the environment may be to become aware of it: to sit and gaze in wonder at the stars, to plunge their hands into soil while gardening, to help children to understand that fruit and vegetables originally come from plants and not refrigerators, or to find peace in a beautiful garden.

But for billions of people around the world, it is not possible to lose touch with their natural environment. Caring for the earth is not a matter of reacquainting themselves with nature, but of struggling to survive. Environmental justice becomes most clearly a matter of justice for the poor, who themselves understand it as a matter of life or death.

<sup>16</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 1997

<sup>17</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 1997



## *He aha te mea nui i te Ao?* – *What is the greatest thing in the world?*

Maori proverb

*Hutia te rito o harakeke  
Kei hea te Komako e Ko?  
Ki mai koe ki ahau  
He aha te mea nui i te Ao?  
Maku e ki atu  
He tangata, he tangata, he tangata*

*When the heart is torn from the flaxbush, where  
will the bellbird sing?  
You ask me: What is the greatest thing in the world  
My reply is: People, people, people*



PHOTO: PAUL SORRELL

## **Kaitiakitanga – Guardianship of the land**

One of best known of Maori proverbs asks “He aha te mea nui? – What is the greatest thing in the world” with the famous reply: “He tangata, he tangata, he tangata – People, people people”. What is perhaps less well known is the opening of the proverb, which speaks of the connection of living beings with their environment: “Hutia te rito o harakeke, kei hea te Komako e Ko? – If the heart is torn from the flaxbush, where will the bellbird sing?”

For many New Zealanders, these two issues may seem separate, even unrelated. Understanding them in the context of this famous proverb helps us to understand that for the tangata whenua of Aotearoa New Zealand, they are intrinsically connected. The wellbeing of people – according to the proverb, the “most important thing in the world” – is linked with the question of environmental sustainability.

There is an additional spiritual link, according to Wellington Archdiocese Turanga Maori Morna Taute. Two additional lines that are less frequently used say: Te kaitaki mai i te ata, karahi - e kii ana, maranga ake ki te ra hou – *One [the bellbird] that heralds the coming of the Dawn – Arise to the new day and be on the alert.* If the flax bush is lost, and the bellbird does not sing, the people also lose the dawn call to prayer.

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops recognise that care for the environment is “also in keeping with the traditions of the Maori of Aotearoa that we need to respect the sacredness of creation, as partners in life with the earth, the oceans, the lakes, the animal world, the mountains, the fish of the sea and the birds in our forests and gardens. From such sources, balanced by the infinite hand of God, we draw all life and nourishment. Without them we face death.”<sup>18</sup>

The relationship of indigenous people to land is often linked inextricably to their identity. Pope John Paul II recognised that “when such indigenous peoples are deprived of their land they lose a vital element of their



*It's about our aroha for the land and  
aroha for the ancestors who trod on  
the land before us and all the things  
we saw them do. Justice can't be done  
if the people who are in control don't  
have the same love for the people and  
the land that serves those people.*

Rangi Davis, Moerewa

way of life and actually run the risk of disappearing as a people.”<sup>19</sup> In many Latin American countries and throughout the world, Caritas has learned that land title laws can prevent indigenous peoples and women from owning, and often even from renting or living on, land that supports their livelihood. They become the most marginalized of the poor, living in areas which have the worst access to food and water, and are most vulnerable to environmental hazards, including disasters.

In his message to our region, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, Pope John Paul II spoke specifically about the Pacific: “Oceania is a part of the world of great natural beauty, and it has succeeded in preserving areas that remain unspoiled. The region still offers to indigenous peoples a place to live in harmony with nature and one another.”<sup>20</sup>

New Zealand government legislation frequently translates the Maori understanding of stewardship or guardianship of natural resources as “Kaitiakitanga” but the concept is much greater than a simple translation of the English word, involving an understanding of living in accordance with natural laws and ways of the environment, rather than forcing it to adapt to human needs and desires.

New Zealand historian Michael King said that Maori people developed their understanding of the importance of conservation following the extinction of moa, which would have caused hardship to communities who had depended on the large flightless birds as a food source. Preserving the natural environment became a sacred duty for Maori, with concepts such as rahui (a restriction, for example, on harvesting a resource which was seen to be vulnerable) becoming essential to survival.<sup>21</sup>

It makes sense to learn from this local wisdom, from a sense of respect for tangata whenua – the people of the land. Tui Cadogan says this term is understood as people belonging to land, rather than land belonging to people.<sup>22</sup> But also because it is common sense to learn from those who have lived with the land, plants, weather and other aspects of this natural environment for far longer than most other New Zealanders.

Mainstream secular Pakeha society often finds it hard to understand Maori people’s relationship with the land. Catholics who understand our natural environment as a gift from God to be cared for and respected may find that we have more in common with Maori spirituality concerning relationships between God, land and people than we expect.



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

*“The strengths of Maori culture are often the values which modern society is in danger of losing: an acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension in every aspect of life; a profound reverence for nature and the environment; a sense of community, assuring every individual that he or she belongs.”*

Pope John Paul II, Auckland 1986

19 Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1989

20 Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 2001

21 King, Michael: *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, 2003

22 Cadogan, Tui: A Three-Way relationship: God, Land, People, A Maori woman reflects, in *Land and Place, He Whenua, He Wahi*, Bergin, Helen and Smith, Susan (eds), Accent Publications, 2004



*The country is in mourning and all who live in it pine away*

Hosea 4:3

## Urgency of the world's environmental situation

*"Today the ecological crisis has assumed such proportions as to be the responsibility of everyone."*<sup>23</sup>

Pope John Paul II

The state of the world's environment is grim reading. Pope John Paul II described the environmental destruction of the earth at the turn of the 21st century as having disappointed divine expectations. "In our time, humanity has unhesitatingly devastated wooden plains and valleys, polluted the waters, deformed the earth's habitat, made the air unbreathable,...blighted green spaces, implemented uncontrolled forms of industrialisation, humiliating the earth."<sup>24</sup>

A few points illustrate the scale of the problem:

- Two-thirds of services provided by nature, to humankind are in decline. This includes much that is essential to our survival, such as access to safe water and food.<sup>25</sup>
- We are losing species at a rate of up to 1000 times the natural rate of extinction. Between a third and a half of all species expected to die within next 200 years. Between 10–15 percent of plant species may be extinct by 2050.<sup>26</sup>
- The concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased by a third since 1750. Sixty percent of this increase has happened since 1959. The global warming caused by this is producing an anticipated speed of climate change greater than anything seen for at least 10,000 years.<sup>27</sup>
- More than half the world's major rivers are seriously depleted and polluted.<sup>28</sup>
- Over a billion people do not have access to safe water and over two and a half billion people in the world lack adequate sanitation. It is estimated that by 2025, two thirds of the world's population will have moderate to severe difficulties maintaining access to clean and safe drinking water.<sup>29</sup>



*"The rising of the sun is a sign to us of life, but the rising of the sea is a sign to us of death." Fr Michael McKenzie says people on Kiribati measure the rising sea in terms of the rows of coconut trees being destroyed, and the amount of black soil now infertile as a result of salt water. Islands once surrounded by peaceful lagoons have become vulnerable to high tide and storm surges, making fishing more difficult and hazardous.*

*Land based food sources are also being affected, as fewer and smaller fruits are harvested, while plants grown for medicines are losing their potency. Salt water is beginning to seep into fresh water supplies, meaning some islanders now must walk one or two kilometres to fetch water.*

*"The commandment 'Thou shalt not kill' takes on new meaning in the context of global warming, where the industry and lifestyle of people living thousands of miles away are indirect ways of killing our people."*

Fr Michael McKenzie, Kiribati

23 Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1990

24 Pope John Paul II, *General Audience Address*, 2001

25 United Nations: *Millennium Ecosystems Assessment*, 2005

26 United Nations: *Millennium Ecosystems Assessment*, 2005

27 *New Internationalist*, May 2005

28 United Nations Environmental Programme: *Global Environmental Outlook 3*, 2004

29 United Nations Environmental Programme: *Global Environmental Outlook 3*, 2004



*We used to have a hangi at harvest time. Now there's no hangi. There's no harvest. The land was very dear to people when we were growing up. We knew a beautiful life that existed, which made us appreciate real living.*

*We've been thinking about this through the kumara – these things that Papatuanuku gives, they don't have the durability they used to. We have to eat them quickly or they are all gone. There's blossom on the trees in July. Everything is back to front. We've noticed a lot of that. All around the world these things are happening – hurricanes, tornadoes, hail storms as big as oranges. It's time that people woke up. If you get [together] with the kuia and kaumatua they would tell you all the signs of the environment and what to look for. People need to be good to creation and good to each other.*

Irene and Rawiri Hancy, Omania, Hokianga

- Land degradation was estimated in 1991 to be worsening at a rate of 5 to 6 million hectares per year. By 1996 it had affected nearly 15 percent of the world's land area. Deforestation was the largest single cause of land degradation, followed by agriculture and industrial activities.<sup>30</sup>
- Over past decades, there has been declining fertility in much of the earth's soil, due to overuse or inadequate replenishment. An estimated 2 billion hectares (17 percent of the Earth's vegetated surface) have suffered soil degradation since 1945.<sup>31</sup>
- The oceans face major threats in the form of marine pollution, overexploitation of fisheries, by-catch of protected species, and coastal habitat loss.<sup>32</sup>

- The world burns more wood each year than it grows in new trees. While 1.5 billion square metres of timber is estimated to grow each year, the world burns 1.8 billion square metres of wood or charcoal as fuel.<sup>33</sup>

The United Nations Millennium Ecosystems Report described the loss of environmental resources as the running down of capital assets: "Unless we acknowledge the debt and prevent it from growing, we place in jeopardy the dreams of citizens everywhere to rid the world of hunger, extreme poverty and avoidable disease – as well as increasing the risk of sudden changes to the planet's life-support systems from which even the wealthiest may not be shielded."<sup>34</sup>



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

*"An abuse, a deterioration, in one part of the world has repercussions in other places and can spoil the quality of other people's lives, often unbeknown to themselves, and through no fault of their own."<sup>35</sup>*

Pope Paul VI

30 United Nations Environmental Programme: *Global Environmental Outlook 3*, 2004

31 Millennium Project: *Interim report of Task Force 6 on Environmental Sustainability*, 2004

32 United Nations: *Millennium Ecosystems Report*, 2005

33 Millennium Project: *Interim report of Task Force 6 on Environmental Sustainability*, 2004

34 United Nations: *Millennium Ecosystems Report*, 2005

35 Pope Paul VI, *Message to the Stockholm Conference on Human Development*, 1972

## Shall the earth be forsaken because of you?

Job 18:4

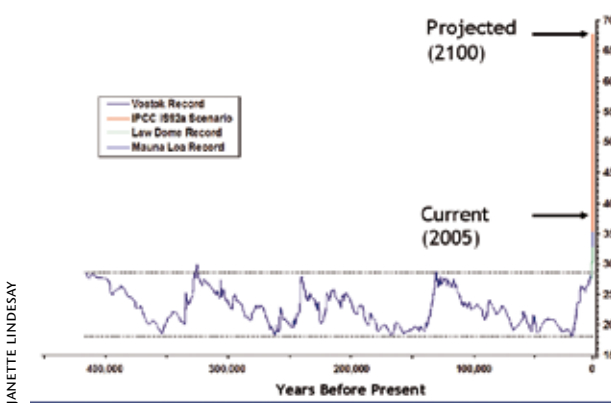
### Our changing climate

*"In facing climate change, what we already know requires a response: it cannot be easily dismissed."*<sup>36</sup>

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Oxford scientist Benito Muller says that over the past hundred years, humankind has unintentionally become a force that affects the earth's climate system. "It graduated – or blundered – from 'climate-taker' to 'climate-maker'."<sup>37</sup>

#### Concentration of carbon in the atmosphere over 42,000 years<sup>38</sup>

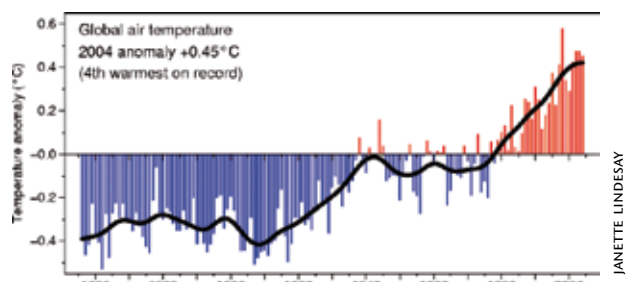


Climate change is sometimes portrayed in the media in terms of uncertainties: as a debate between different branches of science, or scientific theories. However, a considerable wealth of evidence has already been presented in the form of reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which includes reports from over 1300 scientific experts, drawn from across many scientific disciplines.

While presenting a range of possible outcomes, these scientists are united in warning the world that human activity – additional to any natural variation – is changing the composition of the earth's atmosphere and that will result in changes to life on earth.

In 2001, the IPCC warned that the projected warming over the 21st century is without precedent in the past 10,000 years. Other findings included:

- There is new and stronger evidence that most of the warming observed over the last 50 years is attributable to human activities.
- Human influences will continue to change atmospheric composition throughout the 21st century.
- Surface temperatures projected to increase between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees by 2100.
- In past 100 years global average temperatures increased by 0.6 degrees, global average sea level has risen by 0.1–0.2 metres, and snow and ice have decreased.



The United States Catholic Bishops called for "prudent" decision making in the light of what is already known about climate change, saying that prudence is not, as popularly thought, simply a cautious and safe approach to decisions. "Significant levels of scientific consensus – even in a situation with less than full certainty, where the consequences of not taking action are serious – justifies, even can obligate, our taking action intended to avert potential dangers."<sup>39</sup>

For most scientists – and for most governments, insurance agents and fuel companies – climate change is no longer theory, but reality. There is no doubt among development agencies that many of the world's poorest people are already experiencing the effects of climate change. From more extreme weather events, such as the strong hurricanes which hit New Orleans and Central America in 2005, to droughts in Africa and changing weather patterns in the Pacific, many people are already conscious of living on the edge of a changing world.

<sup>36</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good*, 2001

<sup>37</sup> Muller, Benito (Oxford Institute for Energy Studies): "Global Climate Change Regime: Taking stock and looking ahead" in Grover, Velma (ed): *Climate change: five years after Kyoto*, Science Publishers, Enfield, USA 2004

<sup>38</sup> Lindsay, Dr Janette: *Climate change: a science briefing*, Presentation to Catholic Earthcare Australia conference, 2005

<sup>39</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops: *Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence and the Common Good*, 2001

Policy discussions in New Zealand and other developed countries are working on the assumption that we have another twenty years to develop technological and technical solutions to the problems we face, such as alternative fuel or transport sources. In these circumstances, many New Zealanders regard climate change as potentially life-style threatening, but not necessarily a matter of life and death.

But in developing countries climate change is already regarded as life threatening. For many it is a matter of disaster management. For millions of people, food production, water supplies, public health and people's livelihoods are already being damaged and undermined.<sup>40</sup> The World Health Organisation estimates that the earth's warming climate already contributes to 150,000 deaths and five million illnesses each year, and this could double by 2030.<sup>41</sup> It has been estimated that climate change could result in at least 150 million environmental refugees by 2050.<sup>42</sup>

The environmental organisation Friends of the Earth says New Zealand is the only country in the world that has made any provision for people who will be displaced by climate change. However, our provisions are not generous – the Pacific Access Category provides for 75 residents each year from Kiribati and Tuvalu, and 250 from Tonga and Fiji to move to New Zealand. However, the requirements are difficult to meet, and the elderly and poor, who are most vulnerable, have little chance of being accepted.<sup>43</sup>



*My feijoas ripened three weeks early this year. This could be an unwelcome reminder that global warming is upon us. There is a threat that human activities could for the first time ever cause an extinction of all life. This is slowly waking us up to the urgency of halting its progress. But it is fickle to make only a pragmatic response. As Christians, we celebrate nature's beauty and abundance as God's gifts to us, a treasure we strive to pass on to our children. As proposed by the Australian Bishops, willful neglect of the environment should be declared a sin.*

Frank Hoffman, Papakura parish

*Earth care is not an optional extra. In the same way that poverty requires of us a conversion, so does the ecological crisis. It requires of us something that is radical and demanding. The welfare of human beings depends on the welfare of the earth. We have no other way of knowing God except in this Creation.*

Mary Thorne, Papakura parish

40 Working group on Climate Change and Development: *Up in smoke*, 2004

41 *Dominion Post*, 21 November 2005

42 Catholic Institute for International Relations: *Weather warning – why should we care?* 2006

43 Friends of the Earth: *A Citizen's Guide to Climate Refugees*, 2005



## *The world is given to all, and not only to the rich*

Saint Ambrose

### The suffering of the poor

*“Want, it has rightly been said, is the worst of all pollutions.”*<sup>44</sup>

Pope Paul VI

Environmental destruction contributes to poverty, but poverty also contributes to environmental destruction. Poor communities are more likely than others to depend directly on natural resources, and to live in environmentally vulnerable areas.

Environmental degradation and environmental disasters affect people in developing countries far more than those in developed countries. For example, people who depend on subsistence farming cannot buy replacement food when crops fail, and cannot compensate for poor harvests by using more fertilizer. Throughout the world, most rural poor people live in ecologically fragile areas, while urban poor live and work in places which are full of environmental hazards.<sup>45</sup>

Pope John Paul II believed a proper ecological balance would not be found without directly addressing the structural forms of poverty that exist throughout the world. “The poor, to whom the earth is entrusted no less than to others, must be enabled to find a way out of their poverty.”<sup>46</sup>

The close relationship between development and environmental work is recognised by the New Zealand government’s international aid division NZAID, who recognise that natural resources are the principle assets of the poor.

“It is widely recognised that poor people tend to be most severely affected when the environment is degraded or their access to natural resources is limited or denied. They suffer most when water, land and air are polluted. Poor people are often most exposed to environmental hazards and least capable of coping when disasters such as drought, floods or cyclones occur. They have few options for using limited local resources so poverty can itself contribute to environmental degradation and environmental mismanagement.”<sup>47</sup>

Climate change is predicted to impact more severely on poor countries and people who have less directly contributed to creating the problem. The World Health Organisation reports: “Those most vulnerable to climate change are not the ones responsible for causing it. Our energy consumptive lifestyles are having lethal impacts on other people around the world, especially the poor.”<sup>48</sup>

In 2000 the states of the United Nations signed up to eight Millennium Development Goals, which aimed to eliminate poverty. The goals intended to focus the effort of the world community on achieving significant, measurable improvement in people’s lives.



*“Soil and water are the mainstays of our present and future physical life. The present situation not only jeopardises the possibility of life for the future generations to whom we would leave an exhausted environment as an heritage, but it also places in doubt our present hope of using water for the fishing, drinking, transportation and the electric energy our people need in order to live a life befitting the citizens of these countries, and above all as human persons to whom God entrusted the stewardship and use of the earth.”*<sup>49</sup>

Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

44 Pope Paul VI, *Message to the Stockholm Conference on Human Development*, 1972

45 World Bank, *The Environment and the Millenium Development Goals*, 2002

46 Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1990

47 *Dominion Post*, 21 November 2005

48 NZAID: *Draft environmental policy*, 2005

49 Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands: *Creating an environment for tomorrow*



## The Millennium Development Goals

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieve universal primary education
3. Promote gender equality and empower women
4. Reduce child mortality
5. Improve maternal health
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensure environmental sustainability
8. Develop a global partnership for development

There are many warnings that environmental damage, and in particular climate change, are undermining the world's ability to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, in particular to end extreme poverty. "Our planet is losing species at a rate that is two to three orders of magnitude faster than the background rate, many ecosystems are being degraded or completely destroyed, and the loss of ecosystem services is undermining sustainable development."<sup>50</sup>

Most people throughout the world depend directly on the earth for their day to day survival. Even though this may seem obvious, people in developed countries like New Zealand who purchase food rather than grow or gather it ourselves, can easily lose sight of the daily dependence on nature for survival. Loss of land does not only mean loss of a home, it means loss of food, water, fuel and livelihood.



*Villagers at Atsaithong Village in southern Laos met Caritas programmes officer Tara D'Sousa. She asked: "Can you tell me about your problems?" "We have no problems", they replied, "Only difficulties." For six months of the year, when the rainy season sets in and stocks of rice have run out, families forage in the forests for food. Bamboo shoots, roots, tubers and leaves, fish and small animals become the primary food source. These foods are fresh, natural and rich in protein: they do not pose a problem. The difficulty arises out of the fact that logging companies are swiftly causing those forest resources to dwindle.*



*We are unaware of the amount of time it takes most of the world to prepare and grow food. The time frame of growing food includes preparing the soil, planting seeds, nurturing the plants and having an awareness of the time that food needs to be harvested. Our grandparents were aware of this, but many people have come to depend on frozen or canned food. We become divorced from the reality of life, the reality of the poor who live off the land, and the whole time frame involved in finding and preparing food. In my work in the garden I am conscious of the constant work of the poor who are utterly dependent on the land.*

Mary Maitland, Onerahi, Whangarei

*The earth may fall apart. The mountains may fall.*

Psalm 46:2

## Disasters

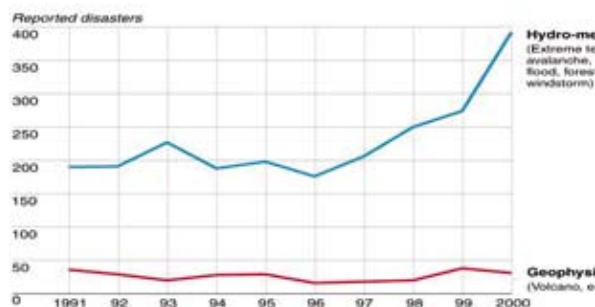
*“Lifting people out of poverty is the best way to reduce the number who have to be lifted out of mud, floodwaters or drought when disasters strike.”<sup>51</sup>*

UK Working Party on Climate Change and Development

As well as the longer term, sometimes slower, effects of much environmental destruction, there are also rapid, sudden changes, which can sometimes be mistaken for natural disasters, but result from human activity.

As an aid agency, Caritas responds to emergencies, and is aware that there is an upward trend in disasters with a meteorological cause (such as weather or temperature) which is affected by human activity, compared with disasters with a geophysical cause (such as earthquakes or volcanoes) which are not affected by human activity.

Natural Disasters Trends, 1991-2000



Source: Centre for the Epidemiology of Disasters

Harvard Medical School's Centre for Health and the Global Environment gives two scenarios with varying degrees of extreme weather events. In one, global warming will "strain the world's resources" in the other it would cause "blows to the world economy sufficiently severe to cripple the resilience that enables affluent countries to respond to catastrophes".<sup>52</sup>



*“We would like to say a word about God's promise to Noah not to flood the earth again. Some Christians view this covenant as a guarantee that they are not at risk of flooding from climate change. But the sea level is rising and threatening Pacific Islands with flooding from high tides and storm surges. This is not an act of God. It is a result of human economic and consumer activities that pollute the atmosphere and lead to climate change. Most of these polluting emissions come from highly-industrialised countries. Our response to God's covenant with Noah should be to act in love toward God's creation and to reduce the pollution that is contributing to climate change. By placing us on the earth, God has given us both the right to use it and the responsibility to do so with care.”*

The Otin Taai Declaration<sup>53</sup>

While disasters can be particularly devastating in developing countries, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in the United States in 2005 scandalised the world because of the inability of the richest country of the world to protect its poorest citizens during a natural disaster. Warmer seas contributed to a stronger hurricane, while removal of wetlands around New Orleans had weakened the city's natural defences to extreme weather events.

<sup>51</sup> Working group on Climate Change and Development: *Up in smoke*, 2004

<sup>52</sup> *Dominion Post*, 21 November 2005

<sup>53</sup> The Otin Taai Declaration – Pacific Churches statement on climate change, 2004

*The Patayas landslide in the Philippines buried over 300 people under tonnes of garbage. The resulting inquiry found the deaths were acts of God, even though the garbage dumps had been allowed to tower over urban suburbs. Scripture teacher Br Kieran Fenn of Lower Hutt was in the Philippines at the time:*

*“God gets the blame for human greed.”*



Many communities have traditional ways of coping with disaster, but the kinds of situations likely to arise under global warming are ones that have never before struck humankind, and we can have no traditional preparation for them.

The fear is that severe climate change may result in domino like effects – for example as land based ice melts, methane is released from thawing sod. Climate shocks, such as those that have previously occurred when the ice shelf has slipped off Antarctica could result in drastic disasters, such as the failure of ocean currents or a tsunami over New Zealand.

However, even a continuation of the extreme weather disasters that we have seen in the past ten years will take its toll on New Zealanders struggling to cope with environmental disasters at home. Predictions are that by 2080, drought conditions currently described as a “1 in 20 year” event will happen approximately every 7 years in North Otago, every 3 years in Northland and every 2.5 years in the Hawkes Bay, while greater rainfall is expected in parts of New Zealand already regularly facing flooding.<sup>54</sup>



*Willie and Pat Herlihy lost almost everything they owned when their home fell into the Feilding flood waters in 2004. The two brothers lived in the family home, built in 1908, which was normally several metres away from the tiny Kiwitea stream. On February 15 the stream became a raging torrent of water.*

*Television footage of their house falling into the river was replayed many times. Willie said they packed some possessions but didn't realise at first how close the flood was. “Then I looked out the back door and saw the river raging, and I shut the door and locked it.” When they were told they had to evacuate. “I said goodbye to the house – thank you, goodbye and I left.”*

*A week and a half after the house went into the river, to everyone's amazement the hundred year old family Bible was found in Oroua. When asked by a journalist how the loss of his home and the recovery of the Bible affected his faith, Willie answered: “God gave it to us and God will take it away one day.”*



## *Earth has given and human hands have made*

From the Eucharistic prayer

### Sustainability

*“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.”<sup>55</sup>*

Pope John Paul II

Creation is not growth without limit. In our Biblical tradition, inherited by Christians from Old Testament Jewish law, God set limits on Creation through the Sabbath and the fallow years of the Jubilee. Rest and recuperation is allowed both for human activity and for the earth itself.

The Sabbath laws laid out in Leviticus 25 provided not only for people to rest on each seventh day, but also for cultivated land to lie fallow every seventh year, and also in the year of Jubilee when those who depend on the earth for survival are asked to allow the ground to rest and rejuvenate.

Learning to live sustainably means learning to live in a way that allows the communities of the earth – including plants, animals, micro-organisms and their non-living surroundings – to live in a way that can sustain themselves, and the people who depend on them far into the future.

People need to change the way that we act so we do not disrupt the functioning of ecosystems, and to even improve the provision of goods and services from the earth. For Catholic social teaching, this is the true meaning of Stewardship, of being called to “cultivate the treasures of creation” as we were called to do.<sup>56</sup>

This requires us to recognise that “we cannot continue to use the goods of the earth as we have in the past”<sup>57</sup> and to recognise that our current economic systems are not protecting the earth.



*Caritas supports a sustainable agriculture project run by ADDAC in northern Nicaragua. It brings together many small producers, who have often depended on traditional slash and burn agricultural techniques, to support each other in cooperatives now geared towards sustainable, organic ways of growing food.*

*The project has given farmers the opportunity to diversify their crops, as many were previously solely dependant on beans or corn, leaving them vulnerable to crop failure if a pest or blight affected that crop. Now many farmers have been able to move into growing a wider variety of fruit and vegetables, as well as crops like coffee and cocoa. This has also opened new markets for them as organic producers, both in Nicaragua and to a growing export market.*

*In addition to guaranteeing their livelihood and giving greater control over decisions about their work, the project has also brought together farmers and producers who had been deeply divided by the war between the Contras and Sandanistas in their area.*

55 Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1990

56 Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Oceania*, 2001

57 Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1990

58 Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 1991

It is the task of the State, taught Pope John Paul II, to provide for the defence and preservation of common goods such as the natural and human environments, which cannot be safeguarded simply by market forces. “Here we find a new limit on the market: there are collective and qualitative needs which cannot be satisfied by market mechanisms. There are important human needs which escape its logic. There are goods which by their very nature cannot and must not be bought or sold.”<sup>58</sup>

Sustainable agriculture is a significant part of international development work, but there are also groups in New Zealand who deliberately choose a sustainable, simple lifestyle both as an act of solidarity with the poor, but also to show a society overwhelmed with consumerism that there are clear alternatives. One example in New Zealand is the St Francis farm in the Hokianga, where the Land family make a deliberate choice and effort to live according to sustainable principles and voluntary poverty in the tradition of St Francis of Assisi.



*People have more to spend but feel poorer than ever because they don't have what they think they need to spend. We see consumerism as the other direction to sustainability. It carries with it such a lack of satisfaction that it feeds itself. In a lifestyle like this we feel satisfied daily. It is immensely satisfying to know you don't need anything else.*

Joseph and Catherine Land, St Francis Farm, Hokianga



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

*“Because creation was entrusted to human stewardship, the natural world is not just a resource to be exploited but also a reality to be respected and even revered as a gift and trust from God. It is the task of human beings to care for, preserve and cultivate the treasures of creation.”<sup>59</sup>*

Pope John Paul II



## To live in harmony with nature and one another

Ecclesia in Oceania

### Repentance

*"The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. Therefore the earth's treasures no longer serve to build God's garden for all to live in, but they have been made to serve the powers of exploitation and destruction."*<sup>60</sup>

Pope Benedict XVI

Pope Benedict XVI began his leadership of the Church speaking of the spiritual vacuum which drives ecological destruction. He repeated the message of Pope John Paul II that environmental problems are not simply economic and technological, but moral and spiritual.

The environmental crisis shows clearly the connection between personal and social sin. Through individual acts of waste and selfishness we have built a selfish society, characterised by a desire for short term gain and disregard for the needs of others. "What is required is an act of repentance on our part and a renewed attempt to view ourselves, one another, and the world around us within the perspective of the divine design for creation."<sup>61</sup>

Pope John Paul II said that in our desire to have and to enjoy rather than to be and to grow, people are consuming the resources of the earth and our own lives in an excessive and disordered way.<sup>62</sup> He said that modern society would find no solution to the ecological problem unless we take a serious look at our lifestyle. "In many parts of the world society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause."<sup>63</sup>

The Bishops of New Zealand also recognised care of the environment as a moral crisis, and a clear illustration of a fundamental lack of respect for life. "The modern consumer culture, itself imbued with an ethos of competition, can do violence to the weak, the vulnerable, the feeble, the poor, and the powerless, while rewarding the strong, the beautiful, the powerful and the rich. The very life and ecology of the planet faces severe threats from pollution, exploitation and mismanagement of its resources. Too often the driving forces for social change are greed and the desire for power, rather than the common good and solidarity of humanity."<sup>64</sup>



*"What spell are we under that has us as a human community destroying the very system on which we depend?"*

Fr Peter Healy, Wellington

60 Pope Benedict XVI, *Homily at Inaugural Mass*, 2005

61 Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, 2002

62 Pope John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 1991

63 Pope John Paul II, *Message for the World Day of Peace*, 1990

64 New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference, *A Consistent Ethic of Life*, 1997

*Self interest comes in. We don't want to be disturbed in our physical comfort, or even more in our moral comfort, to admit that our actions hurt other people or our wealth deprives them. The world is totally interconnected – according to Jesus, every one of us belongs to every one else.*

Fr Peter Murnane, Auckland



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

The recognition of environmental degradation as a spiritual issue is not confined to the Catholic tradition or Christian traditions. To give one example, the leader of Tibetan Buddhists, the Dalai Lama, believes that in order to protect and conserve the natural environment, human beings must look inside themselves. “These days we are very much involved in the external world, while we neglect the internal world...Only a sense of universal altruism can remove the self-centred motives that cause people to disregard each other’s needs.” <sup>65</sup>

Global warming is a global problem which requires a truly international solution. But it also desperately needs the commitment of individuals, particularly those of us in the wealthiest nations like New Zealand, to make changes to our individual lifestyles and aspirations. The decisions, commitment and action of individuals, families, parishes, schools, workplaces and communities will be decisive in finding a sustainable future.

Catholic social teaching asks us to consider sustainable lifestyles not only because of the frightening prospects that environmental destruction represents; but because it offers the opportunity for “an authentic solidarity of worldwide dimensions.” <sup>66</sup>

*“All technical measures would remain ineffectual if they were not accompanied by awareness of the necessity of a radical change of mentality. All are called to clear sightedness and courage. Will our civilization... discover in time the way to control its material growth, to use the earth’s food with wise moderation, and to cultivate real poverty of spirit in order to carry out urgent and indispensable reconversions?”* <sup>67</sup>

Pope Paul VI

65 Dalai Lama: Foreword to Grover, Velma (ed): *Climate change: five years after Kyoto*, Science Publishers, Enfield, USA 2004

66 Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace: *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (486), 2004

67 Pope Paul VI, *Message to the Stockholm Conference on Human Development*, 1972

*Look up at the sky and count the stars if you can.  
Just so shall your descendants be.*

Genesis 15:5

## Solidarity with future generations

*"We, and much more, our children and future generations are entitled to a better world, a world free from degradation, violence and bloodshed, a world of generosity and love."*<sup>68</sup>

Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch  
Bartholomew I

Solidarity with those who are suffering is a fundamental aspect of compassion and justice. It is perhaps a newer concept for many people to think about this in terms of feeling solidarity with people who are not yet born or not yet suffering.

Whether the land continues to be exploited as a resource or stewarded for future generations is becoming a fundamental moral and political struggle of our times.<sup>69</sup>

The commandment "Thou shall not kill" takes on a much wider meaning when we consider that current consumption patterns are depriving millions of people in the present, as well as future generations of what they need to survive. People who would not dream of passing by a hungry stranger in the street seem content to leave for tomorrow questions of the future survival of their own families.

If the world continues on its current path, the greatest losers will be future generations. Do we want the children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren of those currently consuming the world's resources to look back on our generation and ask why we did not consider their interests?



PHOTO: ADRIAN HEKE

*"It is not too late*

*God's world has incredible healing powers*

*Within a single generation, we could steer the earth toward our children's future.*

*Let that generation start now, with God's help and blessing."*<sup>70</sup>

Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I

68 Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, 2002

69 United Nations: *Millennium Ecosystems Report*, 2005

70 Declaration of Pope John Paul II and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, 2002

# APPENDIX

## Catholic social teaching

Catholic social teaching is a body of thought on social issues that has been developed by the Church over the past hundred years. It reflects Gospel values of love, peace, justice, compassion, reconciliation, service, and community in the context of modern social problems. Catholic social teaching is continually developed through observation, analysis, and action, and is there to guide us in the responses we make to the social problems of our ever-changing world.

We can trace the beginnings of Catholic social teaching back to 1891 when Pope Leo XIII wrote the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. In this document, Pope Leo set out some basic guiding principles and Christian values that should influence the way societies and countries operate. It talked about the right, for example, to work, to own private property, to receive a just wage, and to organise into workers' associations.

### Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

#### Human Dignity

Every single person is created in the image of God. Therefore they are invaluable and worthy of respect as a member of the human family. The dignity of the person grants them inalienable rights – political, legal, social, and economic rights. This is the most important principle because it is from our dignity as human persons that all other rights and responsibilities flow.

#### Human Equality

Equality of all people comes from their inherent human dignity. Differences in talents are part of God's plan, but social, cultural, and economic discrimination is not.

#### Respect for Human Life

All people, through every stage of life, have inherent dignity and a right to life that is consistent with that dignity. Human life at every stage is precious and therefore worthy of protection and respect.

#### The Principle of Association

The human person is not only sacred but also social. The way we organise society directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to develop. People achieve fulfilment by association with others – in families and other social institutions. As the centrepiece of society, the family must be protected, and its stability never undermined.

#### The Principle of Participation

People have a right and a duty to participate in society, seeking together the well being of all, especially the poor and vulnerable. Everyone has the right not to be shut out from participating in those institutions necessary for human fulfilment, such as work, education, and political participation.

#### The Principle of the Common Good

Individual rights are always experienced within the context of promotion of the common good. The common good is about respecting the rights and responsibilities of all people. The individual does not have unfettered rights at the expense of others, but nor are individual rights to be subordinated to the needs of the group.

#### The Principle of Solidarity

We are one human family. Our responsibilities to each other transcend national, racial, economic, and ideological differences. We are called to work globally for justice. The principle of solidarity requires of us that we not concern ourselves solely with our own individual lives. We need to be aware of what is going on in the world around us.

#### Preferential Protection for the Poor and Vulnerable

Our Catholic tradition instructs us to put the needs of the poor and vulnerable first. The good of society as a whole requires it. It is especially important we look at public policy decisions in terms of how they affect the poor.

#### The Principle of Stewardship

We have a responsibility to care for the gifts God has given us. This includes the environment, our personal talents, and other resources.

#### The Universal Destination of Goods

The earth and all it produces is intended for every person. Private ownership is acceptable, but there is also a responsibility to ensure all have enough to live in dignity. If we have more than we need, there is a social mortgage to pay to ensure others do not go without.

#### The Principle of Subsidiarity

No higher level of organisation (such as government) should perform any function that can best be handled at a lower level (such as families and local communities) by those who are closer to the issues or problems.





*All the words written here will disappear like leaves  
before the wind if action does not follow.*

Catholic Bishops Conference of Papua New Guinea  
and Solomon Islands