

Euthanasia – *killing me softly...*

Catholic Worker submission to Parliament

The debate over euthanasia is an emotive one but confronts a harsh reality – the choice of ending life prematurely. It is very current in New Zealand with a referendum and possible legislation permitting it immanent.

We already have older people with a lifetime of contribution to their families and our nation, who hold a wealth of experience and wisdom and have become our most valuable asset, considering the possibility they might end their lives prematurely because of their illness or age. Or, because ‘they have outlived their usefulness.’ Or, because ‘they don’t want to be a burden to others’.

In allowing itself to be swayed by such arguments, our society is at risk in denying one of the most fundamental truths underpinning human existence - that there is a natural cycle to life: we are born, we live, we die.

As members of the worldwide Catholic Worker community, we join Christians of every tradition and all world religions and recognise God as Creator of all that exists, the guiding spirit behind the creation of the cosmos including human persons, and the pulse and guide of modern life. We believe this great Creator Spirit is everywhere around us and within us. We hold the life and the teachings of Jesus as revealed in the New Testament to be a manual to follow. We accept the inviolability of life in all its forms.

We also seek to follow the teaching of Jesus in his ‘Sermon on the Mount’ (Matt 5/1-8) to feed the hungry, work with the dispossessed, the sick, the abandoned, the poor, the disadvantaged and share our resources and time with them. In following the teaching of Jesus, which emphasises the value of every person, not least those whose quality of life has been lessened, we have always opposed war in all its forms and sought to follow the path of non-violence and voluntary poverty as taught and practised by him. As Pope Francis so often repeats, we



Pat Marrin

hope to recognise ‘the face of Christ in the poor more easily.’

Shifting the Moral Compass

The most fundamental argument against euthanasia is that we are eroding yet another foundational block upon which humanity has been built for millennia. Once we formally legislate a pathway to this end, we will never recover the value we have discarded. It will become totally acceptable to think in terms of ‘early termination of life’, as the concept moves into mainstream parlance.

This situation will create an absolute dilemma for many older people as they approach the end of their lives. ‘Am I using too many resources? Should I be getting out of the way?’ Having worked so hard to build up their retirement assets, they will see them being eaten up by rest home care and medical expenses, their remaining resources shrinking

week by week. What will they leave to their families? Well may they reach a state of mind where ‘the right to life’ can become ‘the duty to die.’ Shakespeare’s seventh stage of life could become as vulnerable as the first stage!

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We say that civil society should be built on a moral basis that protects and enhances each of its members without exception from conception until natural death. Euthanasia should be anathema to it. It is a concept that



shouldn't even enter our moral orbit. To erode such a foundation stone is simply dangerous. It places us on a very slippery slope. To argue that it is the compassionate option is emotive and misleading. We could argue the same about any other moral principle, including murder and infanticide.

As Catholic Workers, we stand on an alternative biblical moral foundation stone. All life is sacred, from beginning to end. The origin and constant heartbeat of life is a gift from God. To tamper with that leaves us morally rudderless.

Our Materialist Culture

We all know that the modern consumer society is a 'throw away' culture. Our western culture is more materialist than ever atheistic communism was! Our generation has turned greed, status and acquisition into an art form. More and more our lives are dominated and controlled by trans-national corporations. Our embrace of the TPPA is simply the latest evidence of this. Their nihilistic philosophy states that outside financial worth, utility and profitability, everything else can ultimately be consigned to the scrapheap. This includes, where necessary, the sick, the 'unproductive' and the elderly.

And this where the rubber hits the road. Where is

Who are we?

Members of Te Wairua Maranga Trust, which publishes this paper, have since August 1989 been operating as a community following a Catholic Worker spirituality. We view the Treaty of Waitangi as our nation's founding covenant. We try, however inadequately at times, to live the Sermon on the Mount and its modern implications. We operate three houses of hospitality in Christchurch named after Suzanne Aubert, Joseph Cardijn and Thomas Merton. We offer hospitality to people in need either on a temporary or more permanent basis. We have a continuing outreach to a number of families offering friendship and support. We promote non-violence and a 'small is beautiful' approach to life, practise co-operative work and peace-making, focus on issues of justice, support prison ministry, help create intentional communities, and try to practise voluntary poverty and personalism.

We engage in regular prayer and we also celebrate a liturgy every Wednesday at 6:00 pm at the Suzanne Aubert House, 8A Cotterill St, Addington, (off Poulson St, near Church Square), followed by a shared meal. Anyone is welcome – phone Francis, 338-7105.

We do not seek funding from traditional sources. We hope to receive enough to keep our houses of hospitality open and our various works going. Catholic Worker houses do not issue tax receipts since they are running neither a business nor a church social agency. We invite people to participate personally and unconditionally. Should you wish to make a regular contribution, you may do so through our Te Wairua Maranga Westpac Trust holding account (number 031703-0036346-02). Donations may also be made to **Te Wairua Maranga Trust, Box 33-135, Christchurch. The Common Good:** Editor: Jim Consedine, jjm.conse@xtra.co.nz.. Layout: Barbara Corcoran burkesspass@gmail.com.

www.catholicworker.org.nz

the moral compass within corporate capitalism that constrains and guides it and seeks the common good? Where is the moral compass in it which says that all people are important, brothers and sisters within one human family? That all should be treated justly? That resources should be shared among all peoples? Where is the compass that guides people 'to act justly, love tenderly, walk humbly with their Creator?' Corporate capitalism certainly does not find its moral compass in Catholic Social Teaching. Nor in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures. Nor in any of the other great spiritual and religious traditions. 'Those who abandon Wisdom will die,' (Baruch 4) is a chilling message from the prophet for our time!

As Catholic Workers, we stand on an alternative biblical moral foundation stone. All life is sacred, from beginning to end. The origin and constant heartbeat of life is a gift from God. To tamper with that leaves us morally rudderless.

Is the Stock Exchange the only moral compass they have? The Consumer Price Index? Wall Street? If it is, we know there is no true collective morality found in these places. Here we find a dog-eat-dog set of values at play, greed, self-interest, ruthless and bitter and sometimes violent competition, and theft on an unbelievable grand scale. Such values form the root cause of much modern-day warfare as nations battle for remaining resources.

This reality reflects the antithesis of the Reign of God announced by Jesus. It reflects a moral compass in freefall. A tragic scenario playing out tragic consequences!

Euthanasia – a viable option?

Given the state of this all-pervasive culture, it is not hard to see why a thrust for euthanasia or voluntary assisted suicide should have emerged as a viable option. Why would it not? It's an entirely logical development in a culture which defines people not as human beings but as consumers. A culture that conveniently takes God, the Creator Spirit, out of the equation. So, when certain people cease to produce, and start to consume too many resources, take up too much 'valuable' time, become too 'expensive' to maintain, surely it is logical to make it easy to dispense with them?

With healthcare costs rising and palliative care (though generally great in New Zealand) not everyone's choice, the push is on to deal more 'efficiently' with those who may be seen by some as a burden to others.

And being a burden to others is something most elderly people don't want. It's their greatest fear, their greatest worry. In Oregon, USA, where euthanasia is lawful, a survey in 2014 showed exactly this.

Depression and feelings of uselessness are very common among elderly folk. Add a splice of familial indifference or dysfunction, legacy questions, the financial costs, continued failing health and increased disability, and you have a cocktail of potentially lethal proportions. This vulnerability can be so subtly exploited.

We will vote 'no' in the referendum.

Editorial 1 Towards a free Palestine

In early July, I joined hundreds of people in a rally protesting the annexation of further Palestinian land by Israel and in support of Palestinian independence and autonomy. This was part of a world-wide series of rallies trying to highlight the actions of Israel and its primary backer, the United States and the illegality and injustice of more Palestinian land grabs for Jewish settlers currently underway, all in defiance of the United Nations.

Marchers wished to stand in solidarity with Palestinians who do not want a Jewish homeland that continues to expand and consists of land continuing to be stolen from them right up to the present time.

Palestine today is essentially a giant prison camp with the nuclear-armed Israeli military at all gates deciding who comes and who goes and for how long. From a restraint perspective, that makes it somewhat similar to a NZ prison like Mt Eden, Springhill or Paparua, where people move only at the discretion, direction and will of the guards.

As is usual, when such opposition to Israel occurs, people at the rallies had to deal with the Israeli charge that we are anti-Semitic, hate Jews and do not want a Jewish homeland. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Rallies for a free Palestine almost exclusively consist of people who hate injustice of any stripe, come from every Christian denomination and none, and courageously wear the fallout from such criticism. Like me, they separate genuine Jewish faith from the ideology of Zionism, which operates on a model of apartheid. Personally, the greatest influencers on my life include Jewish leaders and prophets like Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Hosea, John the Baptist, Jesus the Nazarene, Mary of Nazareth, Peter and Paul. Jewish leaders all!

Hiroshima and Nagasaki

August is the month when around the world peacemakers commemorated the horrific atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, 75 years ago. The facts are well known. With the consent of the British Government, the United States two atomic bombs were dropped on 6th and 9th August on these two densely

populated Japanese cities, resulting in between 129,000 and 286,000 deaths (Wikipedia). Accurate figures are difficult of ascertain



because thousands were simply evaporated by the bombs leaving no trace, and many more died horrible deaths later from the effects of radiation poisoning.

At that time, the US was trying to show the Soviet Union where the post-war global power lay and who had the most powerful weaponry. Later information came to light to show clearly that Japan was getting ready to surrender and the bombings were not needed, especially that of Nagasaki, where the Americans targeted the spire of the Catholic cathedral as their focal point.

In the midst of the corona virus pandemic, the danger of nuclear weapons has fallen off the radar somewhat. Yet the danger from them is more apparent now than ever before, with the Doomsday clock edging ever closer to mid-night and the political instability under the regimes of Presidents Trump, Putin and Chi, who control over 90 percent of the weapons. Their potential to blow the world apart and cause death and mayhem makes the dangers from COVID – 19 look almost insipid in comparison! As the *2020 Stockholm International Peace Report* (p 5) sets out in detail, the nine nuclear-armed states including Israel possess 13,400 weapons still and continue to upgrade them.

It is important to mention Israel because Israel is an atomic power, one of the nine countries with such weapons. That is particularly scary because of their expansionist views over Palestinian land.

The world cannot be free while Palestine remains a captive of Israel.

—Jim Consedine

Editorial 2 Expanding our hearts

I grew up in the Sacred Heart parish of Addington, Christchurch. We had several pictures of the Sacred Heart strategically stationed around the various rooms of our home, many given as prizes at school to my prize-winning sister and brothers, who were highly intelligent.

So the Sacred Heart of Jesus forms part of my spiritual DNA, partly because of this upbringing and partly through an expanded understanding of it now and how it links us through love with one another and the whole of Creation.

Our culture universally understands the heart as the symbol of interconnectedness and love between and among people, (check out Valentine's Day cards). By

definition (though rarely recognised), it is also a symbol of social justice because we are linked this way and one part of the heart cannot exist holistically while another part languishes.

If we believe that God's love raised Jesus and was passed in a special way to believers through baptism and Eucharist, then it follows that the Sacred Heart of Jesus beats in a recognisable way within the hearts of all the baptised. And if we believe we are all linked to one another and to all of Creation interdependently (and COVID - 19 has taught us something about this) and God is the hospitable heart of Creation, then the Sacred Heart of Jesus embraces the whole universe in love and cannot be

confined to an icon or one specific religion but is a universal gift. As Teilhard de Chardin taught, ‘the Heart of Jesus (love) is the heart of the world, and the centre of the Centre of the universe, towards which all things converge.’

To accept that the heart of Christ is the heart of the world, requires us to constantly expand our own hearts, deepening our faith and love at each step. For it is only as love grows within that we can experience the love growing without. Theologian Ilia Delloio connects them this way. ‘*Seeing through the eyes of love, I find the world is a unity, a dynamic unfolding of oneness of rich and diverse beauty; the beauty of the stars, the pine trees and the deep woods, the beauty of the ocean and the blue dolphins jumping into the sky, the beauty of carbon atoms bound to their communities of molecules; all of these beauties dazzling like the lights of the northern sky wrapped in the flesh of the human face. And in the beauty of each human face, I see the poetry of God, the word of eternal love.* (Ilia Delloio, *Birth of a Dancing Star*, Orbis Books, 2019)

Stunting our development

What hinders such expansion? For 50 years I have been privileged to have had interaction with people with addictions and opportunity to confront my own. I have come to see that when we fail to expand our hearts through love, we are holding back the plan of God for ourselves, humanity, and Creation.

Addictions can be many and varied - to power and

control, alcohol, gambling, consumerism, sex, nicotine, illicit drugs, pornography, shopping, over reliance on technology (including television, Facebook and the internet). They tend to focus us on our own immediate personal needs and efforts to relieve pain in the short term. Unfortunately, this can lead to negative addictive consequences in the long term, including blighting our relationships, thus impairing the development of an expanding heart of love.

Holistic growth

Recognising and confronting addiction, frees our hearts towards an expanded understanding of seeing ourselves as being important and precious parts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, present in the Risen Christ in its cosmic dimension.

An analogy comes to mind: the rivers, streams and oceans of the world are the veins, capillaries and arteries of the Cosmic Christ. Our own heart’s veins, capillaries, and arteries form an essential part of that life force.

A personal experience of this love (built for most on faith), allows us to understand that we are interconnected with one another and with the whole of Creation and to accept this wonderful gift of seeing ourselves as an integral part of *and within* the Sacred Heart of the Cosmic Christ.

What a fantastic place to be!

—Jim Consedine

Editorial 3 Climate Change link to Covid-19

This edition of *The Common Good* highlights the euthanasia referendum in New Zealand. It is important, one of many pro-life issues we are called to live by as Christians. Important as it is, the primary pro-life issue remains climate change and its potential to destroy the planet we call home.

Irish theologian, Fr Dermot Lane, is about to publish a book which links global warming and COVID – 19 to each other, with the latter a product of climate change.. His new book, *Theology and Ecology in Dialogue: The Wisdom of Laudato Si*, is set to be published soon by Paulist Press in New York. He writes:

‘If you have any sense of the meaning of *Laudato Si*, you begin to see very quickly that COVID-19 is one more expression, and a very sad expression, of the existence of a global climate crisis. You don’t have to be a scientist to realize that we are living on a planet that is in peril. Certain boundaries have been crossed that have resulted in coronavirus. The cause behind the pandemic crisis is climate change, more particularly the destruction of the natural habitat of nonhuman species within the Earth’s ecosystem.’

‘COVID-19 is a crisis within a bigger crisis — it is a health crisis within the context of the climate crisis. All the reports coming out from the United Nations and from various commentators like David Attenborough are highlighting the damage that we are doing to the planet.

We are running out of time. I see the coronavirus as a wake-up call to the climate crisis.’

‘If you don’t get what integral ecology means, all the rest of what I have said won’t fit into place. Integral ecology is an innocent-sounding concept, but it has radical implications for ethics and theology. It is about an interdisciplinary approach to climate change, recognizing that everything is interrelated and interconnected and interdependent.’

‘That is the mantra running through *Laudato Si*. If you get that, you begin to realize that the COVID crisis is one more very sad, very traumatic expression of climate change; then you begin to sit up and realize — this is a challenge for all of us.’

‘Another mantra of the encyclical is the recognition that it is the poor who have contributed the least to climate change and who are suffering the most. We must hear the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth.’

‘Pope Francis is very clear, these are not two crises; they are one and the same crisis manifesting itself in different ways. Care for our common home is not an option, it is not an add-on, it is not something secondary — it is at the heart of Christian experience and if our faith is not informed by that, then it is a defective faith.’

—Fr Dermot Lane is the retired president of Mater Dei Institute of Education at Dublin City University.

Cancel RIMPAC 2020

The NZ Catholic Worker urges the New Zealand Government to completely withdraw from participation in RIMPAC, the US Navy's Rim of the Pacific war preparation and planning exercises due to be held in August 2020.

RIMPAC is a naval war exercise based in and around Hawai'i conducted to demonstrate US domination and control of the Pacific Ocean. It happens every two years; it includes 26 other nations, 25,000 troops and thousands of weapons.

This is military bullying, not international law enforcement. This is for the benefit of US corporations, not to protect ordinary people in the US, NZ or anywhere else. The US military is the tool for US control of valuable resources and access to markets. As a participant in RIMPAC, New Zealand is contributing to this military showcase of imperial violence. The New Zealand public never agreed to be a part of the US-led alliance, and it goes against our societal values of peacekeeping and respect for international law.

RIMPAC is a violation of international law and Indigenous sovereignty. Hawai'i is indigenous land that was stolen and illegally annexed by the US to be used as a sugar plantation and giant military base for Pacific operations. The indigenous people of Hawai'i demand a return of their stolen lands and the rightful recognition of their legitimate authority over the islands.

During RIMPAC, deadly weapons are used on land and sea causing massive environmental destruction to the Hawaiian Islands and the Pacific Ocean. The exercise shells island reserves; uses bombs and missiles to sink ships, leaving ammunition and debris in the sea; and detonates underwater explosives. The US Navy is exempt from the Marine Mammal Protection Act meaning it can test underwater sonar weapons that kill and injure whales, dolphins and other species.

Covid-19 is an additional threat:

Prior to the global spread of Covid-19, New

Zealand had planned to send in excess of 300 troops. Due to the pandemic the exercise has been scaled back from six-weeks to two weeks. The NZ government has indicated that it still plans to send the *HMNZS Manawanui*, a hydrographic dive vessel with 66

soldiers. We have no confidence that the risks to the people of Hawai'i can be effectively managed by the US military given the shocking record of the US government in dealing with infections onboard Navy warships. Nor do we have confidence that there will be effective safeguards to ensure that NZDF personnel are not infected, and do not bring infection back home.

A Global Ceasefire: Now is the Time

The United Nations have called for a Global Ceasefire, to instead focus on combating COVID-19. The fact that the United States was the only member of the UN Security Council to vote against a global ceasefire shows that it is the greatest threat to global security. War and war exercises are not 'essential business' - they are a threat to human life and the ecosystems that sustain us. The New Zealand government has done its best to ensure that Covid-19 does not spread to the Pacific. Now we have a responsibility not to be part of planning for a war in the Pacific that will only see untold human suffering and death.

We are living through a time of change, when ensuring a healthy and peaceful world is paramount. New Zealand has the chance now to be a global partner and a model for other countries by choosing not to participate in 2020. In 1982 New Zealand withdrew from RIMPAC activities. We can do it again.

The New Zealand Catholic Worker believes the Pacific can be a demilitarised place that respects Indigenous sovereignty. We believe the Pacific should be free and independent of militarization by the US, China, or whoever.

—*Cancel RIMPAC Aotearoa Coalition & CW.*

<p>CW Website Leading articles from the first 24 years of <i>The Common Good</i> Alternative funerals Restorative Justice Other theological issues www.catholicworker.org.nz</p>	<p>FUNERAL CHOICE A Catholic Worker Project Cheaper alternatives to consumer funerals www.funeralchoice.co.nz</p>
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Black Lives Matter

All lives matter
That's not the point
It is Black lives that today are under siege

Black lives matter
Three tense words
That speak to the moment

If only the cry had been
'Jewish lives matter'

If only the cry had been
'Cambodian lives matter'

If only the cry had been
'Russian lives matter'

If only the cry had been
'Salvadorian lives matter'

If only the cry had been
'American Indian lives matter'

If only the cry had been
'Hawaiian lives matter'

If only
If only
If only

So let us make sure
That today
'Black lives matter'

So that we do not
Grieve later that
We missed the moment

To right a wrong
That is a blight
On all of us

—Tom Dinell, Honolulu, Hawai'i

Canticle of the Creatures

Most High, all powerful, and good Lord, to you
be all praise, glory, honour and blessing. To You
alone, Most High, do they belong, and no human
being is truly worthy to mention Your Name

Laudato si', mi' Signore, through all your
Creatures: especially our Brother Sun, through
whom You give us light. He is beautiful, radiant and
altogether splendid; and he bears a likeness of You,
Most High One.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, through our Brother
Wind and our Sister Air and every kind of weather,
no matter cloudy or clear; through whom you give
sustenance to all Your creatures.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, through our Sister
Water who is so precious and pure, so useful and
unassuming.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, through our Brother
Fire, through whom you warm and brighten the
night; he is beautiful and cheerful, robust and
strong.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, through our Mother
Earth, who sustains us. She produces all kinds of
fruit, flowers of so many colours and herbs for our
use.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, through those who
forgive for love of You and those who bear
vulnerability, frailty or illness quietly and with a
deep acceptance; for by You, Most High, they will be
blessed.

Laudato si', mi' Signore, through our Sister
Bodily Death who will come to every one of us. We
sympathise with those who may die feeling
unforgiven. Blessed indeed are those whom She
finds doing Your will, for death can do them no
further harm.

Praise and bless my Lord and give Him thanks
and serve him modestly and faithfully.

—Margaret Ingram, CW, Israel

Around the Traps

Drug addiction – to criminalise or to heal? – The US has 5 percent of the world’s population but nearly 25 percent of the world’s incarcerated people locked up in their prisons. An astounding one fifth of its 2.3 million prisoners are behind bars on drug charges. Many are imprisoned merely for the possession of drugs.

Portugal has taken a different approach. In the 1990s, the country was wracked by a drug epidemic which led to significant drug-fuelled violence and death. In 2001, Portugal decriminalised all drugs. The outcome was that drug use actually decreased, deaths by overdose plummeted by 89 percent and new HIV infections among drug users fell from 52 percent to seven percent.

We shouldn’t be surprised at these results. Portugal began dealing with addiction as a health problem. The substances remained illegal but possession of small quantities ceased to be. People are now referred to professional medical services rather than to police stations and courtrooms. Portugal wants its citizens to recover rather than following a punitive approach.

—Jack Derwin, *Tui Motu*, May 2019

Who owns New Zealand? The four largest private landowners in NZ are all foreign-owned forestry companies. Foreign direct investment (ownership of companies) increased from \$15.7 billion in March 1989 to \$121.7 billion as of March 2019 – almost eight times. As a proportion of the total output of the economy, Gross Domestic Product (GDP), it has risen from 22% to 40%.

Statistics NZ data shows the countries where \$100m or more in foreign direct investment was based as of March 2019 as being, in decreasing order: Australia, Hong Kong, US, Japan, UK, Singapore, Canada, Netherlands, British Virgin Islands, China, Cayman Islands, Switzerland, Luxembourg, Germany and France. These accounted for 93% of foreign direct investment in New Zealand. Australia alone accounts for 50% with \$57 billion of the \$113 billion total.

—*Campaign Against Foreign Control of Aotearoa (CAFCA)*

New CW house. It is with great pleasure we welcome the formation of a new Catholic Worker community of young people in Lower Hutt. Calling their home the Ramos Catholic Worker, they have stepped outside famous identities to name their house after two unknown peasant women, Elba Ramos and her 16-year-old daughter Celina, martyred 16 November 1989 by El Salvadorean government troops alongside six well-known Jesuit priests in San Salvador.

Elba was the priests’ housekeeper and Celina had taken shelter with her mother in the priests’ house to protect her from the military who roamed the streets killing civilians during the decades-long civil war against the poor and ‘subversives’. They became ‘collateral damage’ when soldiers raided the priests’ house in the small hours of the

morning and executed the two women alongside the six Jesuits.

Ramos House plans to focus on issues of justice, the homeless, and ex-prisoners trying to get a foothold on life again. The founding members – Che Leason, Maggie Webb, John Richards, Jacob McKay and Mako Marks, were formerly members of Berrigan House CW in Wellington and have converted the former Marist Brothers multi-roomed home in Lower Hutt into a CW house of hospitality. We wish them every success.

Supermoon

during the Easter Vigil, this Passover,
a supermoon rises
at dusk out east
larger than a Sunday dinner plate
lighting the way for humanity
to emerge from lockdown
pointing towards a more unified world
of opportunity for all

it sheds light indiscriminately
on the favelas and barrios of Manila, Rio
the slums of New York, Toronto, Cairo
shanties of Jo’burg, Mumbai, Tripoli
old cities - Rome, Moscow, London
cycleways in India and China
the jungles, forests, rivers, oceans
of our incredible planet

one source of light, smiling
sharing friendly rays
generously, recklessly
available to all
regardless of difference
race, colour, social standing

not judging who deserves
so like God’s grace

—*Jim Consedine*

Nuclear weapons update, June 2020

The nine nuclear-armed states—the United States, Russia, the United Kingdom, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)—together possessed an estimated 13 400 nuclear weapons at the start of 2020. This marked a decrease from the 13 865 nuclear weapons that SIPRI estimated these states possessed at the beginning of 2019. Around 3720 of the nuclear weapons are currently deployed with operational forces and nearly 1800 of these are kept in a state of high operational alert.

The decrease in the overall number of nuclear weapons in the world in 2019 was largely due to the dismantlement of retired nuclear weapons by Russia and the USA—which together still possess over 90 per cent of global nuclear weapons. The reductions in US and Russian strategic nuclear forces required by the 2010 Treaty on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms (New START) were completed in 2018, and in 2019 the forces of both countries remained below the limits specified by the treaty.

New START will lapse in February 2021 unless both parties agree to prolong it. However, discussions to extend New START or to negotiate a new treaty made no progress in 2019. This was due in part to the US administration’s insistence that China must join any future nuclear arms reduction talks—something that China has categorically ruled out.

‘The deadlock over New START and the collapse of the 1987 Soviet–US Treaty on the Elimination of Intermediate-Range and Shorter-Range Missiles (INF Treaty) in 2019 suggest that the era of bilateral nuclear arms control agreements between Russia and the USA might be coming to an end,’ says Shannon Kile, Director of SIPRI’s Nuclear Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-proliferation Programme. ‘The loss of key channels of communication between Russia and the USA that were intended to promote transparency and prevent misperceptions about their respective nuclear force postures and capabilities could potentially lead to a new nuclear arms race.’

Next-generation nuclear weapon systems are in development

Russia and the USA have extensive and expensive programmes under way to replace and modernize their nuclear warheads, missile and aircraft delivery systems, and nuclear weapon production facilities. Both countries have also given new or expanded roles to nuclear weapons

in their military plans and doctrines, which marks a significant reversal of the post-cold war trend towards the gradual marginalization of nuclear weapons.

The nuclear arsenals of the other nuclear-armed states are considerably smaller, but all these states are either developing or deploying new weapon systems or have announced their intention to do so. China is in the middle of a significant modernization of its nuclear arsenal. It is developing a so-called nuclear triad for the first time, made up of new land- and sea-based missiles and nuclear-capable aircraft.

India and Pakistan are slowly increasing the size and diversity of their nuclear forces, while North Korea continues to prioritize its military nuclear programme as a central element of its national security strategy. Although North Korea adhered to its self-declared moratorium on the testing of nuclear weapons and long-range ballistic missiles in 2019, during the year it conducted multiple flight tests of shorter-range ballistic missiles, including several new types of system.

Low levels of transparency in reporting on nuclear weapon capabilities

The availability of reliable information on the status of the nuclear arsenals and capabilities of the nuclear-armed states varies considerably. ‘The USA has disclosed important information about its stockpile and nuclear capabilities but in 2019 the US administration ended the practice of publicly disclosing the size of the US stockpile,’ says Hans M. Kristensen, Associate Senior Fellow with SIPRI’s Nuclear Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-proliferation Programme and Director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists (FAS). The UK and France have also declared some information. Russia does not make publicly available a detailed breakdown of its forces counted under New START, even though it shares this information with the USA.

The governments of India and Pakistan make statements about some of their missile tests but provide little information about the status or size of their arsenals. North Korea has acknowledged conducting nuclear weapon and missile tests but provides no information about its nuclear weapon capabilities. Israel has a long-standing policy of not commenting on its nuclear arsenal.

Source - *The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) yearbook*, June 2020

Intentional Christian communities

An intentional Christian community is a relatively small group of persons committed to on-going conversation and shared action along four distinguishable but inter-related dimensions.

The four dimensions are (1) people maintain a high degree of mutuality in their relationships; (2) they critique the world in which they live from the standpoint of Gospel values; (3) they cultivate and sustain lively connections with other persons, communities and movements of similar purpose; (4) they attend faithfully to the Christian character of their community life.

Bernard J. Lee and Michael McGowan. *Dangerous Memories: House Churches and our American Story*. 1986. p91

Towards a profound transformation

Elise García OP

We marked the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, on *Care for Our Common Home* against the backdrop of a global pandemic that has infected more than 14 million people and claimed more than 655,000 lives around the world. Far from obscuring Pope Francis' call to care for Earth, our common home, this planetary event underscores its essential plea — to hear the integral cry of the poor and the Earth.

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed fundamental fault lines in our social, economic and spiritual foundations — deadly pre-existing conditions and comorbidities. Graffiti on a wall in China says it all: 'We can't return to normal, because the normal that we had was precisely the problem.'

The poor hit hardest

Although the virus is blind to race and national boundaries, it disproportionately impacts people of colour and threatens to devastate people in the global south — both a result of long-standing inequities centred on legacies of racism and white privilege. The World Food Program projects an alarming doubling of people facing starvation by the end of the year — to a quarter of a billion globally, with children facing the brunt of the crisis.

Although a microorganism has caused macro suffering among our 7.8 billion-member human species and brought our global economic engines to a halt, it has had a beneficial impact on Earth's ecosystems and other species. As humans take the only known prevention measures — staying in place and ceasing 'normal' activities — Earth's air and waters are clearing, wild animals are reclaiming space.

Nothing speaks to the root of this divergent response more poignantly than Thomas Berry's lament, issued at the end of the last century, that 'the glory of the human has become the desolation of the Earth.' As the link between ecological degradation and the spread of disease from wildlife to humans is added to the infamy of human impacts on our common home, it is also now eminently clear, as Berry adds, that 'the desolation of the Earth is becoming the destiny of the human.'

The Irish use the word 'cocooning' to refer to their mandated sheltering in place. In nature, a profound metamorphosis takes place in a cocoon — a meltdown that transforms the caterpillar into a butterfly.

Our species is called to no less profound a transformation at this singular moment in the arc of human history. At its base is a spiritual call to awaken to the sacredness, interdependence and interconnectedness of all life. To the numinous gift of Earth. To the inherent dignity of all her people. To the

inherent right of all beings and ecosystems to exist, thrive and evolve. To the reality of our single destiny.

The new normal - a profound transformation

For decades — thanks to visionaries like Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Miriam Therese MacGillis, Beatrice Bruteau, Ivone Gebara, Ilia Delio, among others — seekers have been spiritually enriched by new understandings of our evolving consciousness and place as humans in the 13.8 billion-year unfolding story of the universe. These new understandings of an incomprehensibly large universe that continues to expand and evolve as a single interconnected community reveal the unfathomable mystery of God in our midst. They heighten our awareness of the preciousness of life, in all its diversity and day-to-day particularity, on our majestic blue-green planet, orbiting in the immensity of space.

As we emerge from this epic crucible of human suffering, those who centre their lives in an incarnational story of One body held in Divine Love are called as never before to live these understandings — to make them concrete. As humanity has shown the capacity to radically change behaviours almost overnight, we have an opportunity now that we must seize to help lead the world in 'redefining our notion of progress,' as *Laudato Si'* urges. The common good must be at its heart.

The call is as urgent as it is clear: Even before the global pandemic, we understood from the changing physics of our atmosphere that we were entering a make-or-break decade for humanity to act to avoid catastrophic climate change with its irreversible changes and unimaginable magnitude of global suffering.

A single garment of destiny

Years ago, from a jail in Birmingham, Alabama, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote, 'We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.'

That single garment of destiny enfolds us all — people of every race and ethnicity, the whole Earth community of which we are a part and on which all life depends. As we emerge from our cocoons, may the depths of this contemplative time and space lead to a spiritual conversion that enables us to enter fully into the new life to which we are called: Caught in a blessed network of mutuality, we act as if all life depends on it.

Dominican Sr. Elise D. García OP is president-elect of the US Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR). Reprinted from NCR, May 2020.

The prophetic spirit

Joan Chittister OSB



The eternal icon of the prophet occupies the corner of my desk. The gaunt, wisp of a figure, arms thrown wide, head up and shouting to the sky, looks to the casual observer to be made of heavy lead. I thought so, too—until one day I picked it up. As impossible as it may seem, the

statue was almost weightless. It lay in my hand as quietly as a piece of cardboard—and may well have been made of it, for all I knew. Whatever the substance—lead or papier-mâché—there was nothing to it. The figure was empty. And then I understood. So, too, is the prophetic spirit empty of everything but the Word of God, of everything but what it means to be true to the coming of the will of God for creation.

First and foremost, a real follower of Jesus the Prophet is faithful, forever endures. No new idea, however right, however much the essence of goodness, overgrows old ideas easily or quickly. It took over two hundred years to abolish slavery; more years to abrogate segregation; and now, it seems, even more years to extinguish the racism that is at our historical roots. Nevertheless, the prophetic promise of a world of equals never died out. The hopes of the human heart were impossible to extinguish. Generation after generation of prophetic people rose up century after century to speak a word of justice. The fact is that in our own time, we must do the same.

Second, the prophet does more than denounce evil. Instead, prophetic spirituality envisions a world in which justice and equality, peace and community are the norm rather than the struggle. It is the prophet of our time who leads the way to the development of an alternative vision of life by imagining a new normal. Today's prophets prepare for the reconstruction of society by imagining the achievable and drawing others to see it as well. Vision is the first step toward change. Or as the poet e. e. cummings put it, 'The first act of creation is destruction.' The old order—decaying and disturbing—must go in order to make room for the new.

Prophetic spirituality comes with the grace of boldness. Prophets do not tiptoe around truth nor do they distort it or exaggerate it or embellish it for the sake of being heard. The truth itself is enough. The truth itself commits us all to something better. Bold witnesses do not set out to create the public peace

when the peace is bogus. They simply challenge the establishment with the bare truth. Then, if the system defends itself or if the system makes no response at all, prophets gather new groups with new ideas to plant the seeds that will supplant the old. They strike out to create what seems to some to be the very antithesis of peace. They do not shrink from opening the conversation. They are the spiritual gadflies of societies built on inequity and the voice of peoples trying to be heard. Their sound echoes off all the mountains on the planet.

Finally, they do not despair. They know that God's time is not our time. They understand that change comes in seasons. Saint Paul is a realist. Some of us plant, he says. Then, the next generation waters. All of us hope that the harvest is soon. But in the course of its long, slow coming we do not fail in our faith that the Spirit of God is with us and God's time is near.

—Sr Joan Chittister OSB is a prophet for our time and lives in Erie, Pennsylvania.

signs of the times

sharing one last tomato with my friend
summer crop extended
a sacred moment early July
reflecting on summer vegies
normally finished by late March
here ripening alongside
traditional winter crops
broad beans, leeks, garlic, broccoli

with icecaps melting
record June temperatures
highest since 1890
rogue seas more regular
foreshores battered
sudden storms now frequent
inches of rain per hour
kids kayak down High Street

nature's clear signals
reduce greenhouse gasses
change lifestyles
everything is connected

—Jim Consedine

Letters

Wallyhouse CW
Hawaii'i

Aloha, Jim ...

Sounds like you folks down there have done a better job in corralling the big corona bug. Our numbers here in Hawaii were low for a time, but now we seem to be escalating.

Looks like we've dodged the first hurricane missile of the season. Hurricane Douglas (Jim Albertini, reporting on storm from his island, put an extra 's' on the name ... in honour of friend Jim Douglass, no doubt) appears to have passed us by today, as we hunkered down in anticipation.

Hope you are well and active.

Peace,

Wally Inglis

Ramos Catholic Worker
7 Birch Street,
Waterloo
Lower Hutt

Kia ora whanau,

After a busy few months of setting up the house and all the jobs which that entails, like making feijoa chutney, religious icons, chess sets and spurtles, butchering goats, digging gardens and putting racks for goat hides on the walls, we are finally sending our greetings and thanks to our friends for your support in setting up the new house.

We named the house after Elba Ramos and her daughter 16-year-old Celina, who were massacred alongside six Jesuit priests by the military in San Salvador in 1989 when the priests' house was raided. They were housekeepers for the priests, who had been outspoken defenders of the poor and disenfranchised. While Ignacio Ellacuria and the other priests are well known, we thought it important to remember the two women as being representatives of the more than 70 000 killed by both the military and paramilitaries in the war against the poor in El Salvador in the 1970s-1980s.

We hope things are going well for you all in Otautahi/Christchurch. If you ever find yourselves in our neck of the woods, know there will be a bed and a goat curry for you here.

Blessings,

*Che Leason, Maggie Webb,
Jacob McKay, John Richards
and Mako Marks*

Waikuku
1 July 2020

Kia ora Jim,

Congratulations on an excellent Pentecost edition of *The Common Good*. The frontpage article, *Post-Covid – a new Pentecost?* is spot on and the article on suicide is the best faith-based resource on the topic I've ever come across. Many thanks.

Blessings,

Brian Turner (Rev)

48 Jennifer Street,
Christchurch

Dear Jim,

We both want to congratulate you on that leading article in *The Common Good* (CG93) about how the old institutional Church is failing to meet the needs of the age. You really do pull no punches although you are respectful and balanced too! We felt it especially this morning as we went back to Mass, where we are officially celebrating the creation of the new big North Parish, and behind all the keen faces and the enthusiasm is a firm hand pulling us back to traditional ways.

We do wonder if any of the other priests feel as you do? Or maybe just private misgivings?. Anyway, on this fine and frosty morning, well done to you and keep doing what you are doing!

All the best,

Jack and Margaret Thompson

Titirangi
Auckland

Hi Maree,

Absolutely brilliant! Thank you and all authors for the Pentecost issue! I am brooding (like the Spirit even?) over our freshwater crisis, climate change, COVID-!9, the future and *The Common Good*. So all the articles were grist for the mill of my mind and heart.

Keep safe,

Mary Betz

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The Common Good

Te Wairua Maranga Trust
 Box 33-135
 Christchurch 8244
 New Zealand



Why Hope?

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness... What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction...And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvellous victory.

—Howard Zinn