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CBIS® Catholic Responsible Investments

Julie Tanner
Managing Director,
Catholic Responsible Investments

Raymond J. Burnell
Senior Director,
Catholic Responsible Investments

A decade ago, Pope Francis issued a challenge to investors, to hold technology and telecommunications companies accountable for the harm occurring on their platforms and their products. Today, CBIS is still leaning into that challenge through its work keeping children safe in the age of Artificial Intelligence (AI). We asked Julie Tanner and Raymond Burnell to share their thoughts on the journey.

When and where did CBIS's engagements on child safety begin?

Tanner: CBIS began engaging technology and telecommunications companies on child sexual exploitation online in 2017 when we participated in the Vatican's Child Dignity Online Conference. We were the only investor invited to take part alongside law enforcement, nonprofit organizations, government leaders, and corporate executives.

What was the initial response from the industry?

Tanner: At the time, with just a few investors raising this issue, most companies were reluctant to engage with us at all.

What's happened in the years that followed?

Tanner: CBIS has filed shareholder resolutions at Verizon, AT&T, and Apple, and later joined resolutions at Meta and Alphabet. The companies were initially surprised and, in some cases, unaware of the scale of exploitation occurring through their services.

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What sort of progress has been achieved with your engagements?

Burnell: Progress has been measured and sustained. Verizon now scans images and videos in the cloud to identify, remove, and report child sexual abuse material. Alphabet enhanced its AI detection tools for exploitative content on Google's platforms. Meta limited the ability of strangers to contact minors and restricted the content they can access. Apple implemented two new communication safety features for children under 12 years old in 2021 and in late 2025 extended default protections to teenagers ages 13 through 17.

Are you working with other investors on these engagements?

Burnell: Yes. CBIS remains an active lead on Apple and continues to collaborate on engagements with Alphabet and Meta. We've also established and facilitate the Child Safety and Technology Working Group within the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), a faith-based investor coalition. The group now includes approximately 35 member organizations.

How has all your previous work evolved into CBIS's broader engagement on ethical AI?

Tanner: The connection is direct. As the AI industry expanded exponentially, CBIS expanded its scope. We're currently engaging the world's largest technology companies through the *World Benchmarking Alliance's Collective Impact Coalition on Ethical AI* , a broader initiative focused on how companies develop, deploy, and govern AI across all applications.

Has the Catholic Church taken a position on AI?

Burnell: Pope Leo's early guidance as pontiff has reinforced and deepened the framework. He emphasizes that AI requires moral responsibility and human wisdom. Speaking at the Vatican's Builders AI Forum, Pope Leo observed: "*The question is not merely what AI can do, but who we are becoming through the technologies we build.*"

Given your progress with many of the tech sector's largest companies, what do you think remains to be done?

Burnell: Our work remains ongoing. Despite the advances companies have made, harmful content and online grooming continue to reach children, particularly in private digital spaces where detection and moderation tools are limited by privacy-first design choices.

Over 300 million children are victimized online each year. Every half second, a child goes online for the very first time; at any given moment, an estimated 50,000 predators are active. The scale of the problem means that even sustained, coordinated progress can struggle to keep pace with the volume of new risk.

It sounds urgent.

Tanner: Recent legal developments have shifted the argument from how companies use AI to protect children to whether the products themselves are defective. CBIS and its coalition partners are developing a coordinated response that reframes their engagement around the concept of foreseeable harm. This is the next frontier of the work.

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info@cbisglobal.com or **(39) 080 919 9232**