



# REFLECTIONS ON WATER



A companion to  
WATER AND SANITATION: A PEOPLE'S GUIDE TO SDG 6  
A rights-based approach to implementation  
Prepared by UN-NGO Mining Working Group, 2017

Compiled by  
INTEGRITY OF CREATION WORKING GROUP  
JPIC COMMISSION of the USG-UISG



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2018

The **JPIC Commission** promotes and supports the integration of JUSTICE, PEACE & INTEGRITY OF CREATION (JPIC) in the life and mission of the Union of Superior Generals (USG) and the International Union of Superior Generals (UISG) and their member congregations. It is responsible for animating men and women religious in justice, peace and integrity of creation according to the vows of the evangelical life, through experience, social analysis, spiritual reflection and action.

The JPIC Commission has its roots in the Pastoral Constitution, *Gaudium et Spes* (cf. n. 90) and in the Synod of Bishops on Justice in the World (1971). In 1982, it was formally established as a joint working group of the USG-UISG. The Commission serves the USG and the UISG, both as Unions and, each according to its own charism, as individual member generalates, to arrive at a greater awareness, clearer analysis and more effective action in matters of justice, peace and integrity of creation. Its preferential option is for the poor, it values collaboration and sharing, participation and communication, and it is committed to continual learning through observing, reflecting, acting.

The purpose of the Integrity of Creation Working Group (ICWG) is to gather information, to increase awareness, to provide informed reflections and to suggest actions concerning the environment. Within the networking of the JPIC Promoters in Rome, the members provide formation resources, encourage religious congregations to be proclaimers of an ecological dimension to our faith, share contributions, and publicize initiatives that religious congregations are continuing to make for the care of creation. To this end, the Integrity of Creation Working Group has put together this booklet on **Reflections on Water**. We invite and encourage you to disseminate this among the members of your community and colleagues in your ministry.

A PDF copy of the booklet is available on the [JPIC website](#). Please feel free to download a copy for printing. To print on a copy machine, choose your paper size and select the FIT button, select PRINT ON BOTH SIDES and FLIP ON SHORT EDGE. Click on the LANDSCAPE orientation button. DO NOT use the booklet option.

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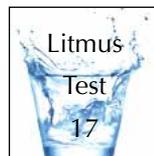
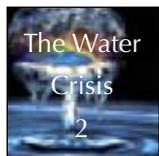
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# INTRODUCTION

This reflection is offered as a companion piece to the booklet *Water and Sanitation: A People's Guide to SDG (Sustainable Development Goals) 6* which was produced in 2017 by the UN-NGO Mining Working Group in New York. In response to the excellent human rights and advocacy information in this document, the Integrity of Creation Working Group (ICWG) in Rome has responded with this booklet using input from the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Hebrew and Christian scriptures, beliefs and responses of other world faith traditions and Catholic Social Teaching. The reflection includes ideas for prayers and liturgy. If we look at the model of See-Judge-Act, this document highlights the reflective aspect of the process on values, beliefs and faith. It invites reflective and ethical consideration informed by religious traditions on the issue of water. We invite you to engage in this document at any point. The content, prayers and scripture passages can be read and discussed individually or as a series offering contemplative insights ultimately leading to awareness and action. Material from the booklet could be used to design a liturgy on the perspective of water. This document, while focussing on the spiritual nature of water, is an attempt to deepen our understanding of the profound crisis addressed in SDG 6.

EVERYTHING IS  
INTERCONNECTED,  
AND THIS INVITES  
US TO DEVELOP A  
SPIRITUALITY OF THAT  
GLOBAL SOLIDARITY  
WHICH FLOWS  
FROM THE MYSTERY  
OF THE TRINITY.  
LAUDATO SI #240

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# 1. THE WATER CRISIS



## A Case Study: Cape Town, South Africa

We have been hearing a lot about the drought which threatens to dry up the city of Cape Town. By July 2018 it is feared that the reservoirs will have become so low that access to the city's water will close down. There will simply not be sufficient water to supply the city. The population of nearly 4 million people will not only have their water rationed but they will have to go and collect it from specified emergency water stations around the city.

### What response can faith groups make to this situation?

In Cape Town the challenges are about the use of water and also about supporting those who are made vulnerable because of the restrictions imposed on the residents of the city.

An article by Brian Pellot in the *National Catholic Reporter* (Feb 7, 2018) relates that a Justice conference organised by the Anglican Archdiocese highlighted messages and prayers around water's sacredness, scarcity, sanitation, biodiversity and sustainability.<sup>1</sup> Also highlighted was the need to help make sure that the elderly, vulnerable, pregnant women etc. were given appropriate support in fetching water from the emergency water stations.

For Muslims, the water crisis has practical implications because of the water needed for ritual washing before prayer. Quds President Hafiz Mahmood Khatib said, "The

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1. Brian Pellot, 'As Cape Town's water crisis nears 'Day Zero', faith groups spring into action', February 7, 2018, *National Catholic Reporter*, Religion News Service, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/environment/cape-towns-water-crisis-nears-day-zero-faith-groups-spring-action>.

importance of washing ourselves and obtaining a state of purity is important, but more important is finding spiritual purity. Islam enjoins us that when water is scarce you can make your ablution with pure sand.”<sup>2</sup>

The same article describes how Cape Town’s Orthodox Jewish community has organised prayers for rain as well as for wisdom at government level about finding solutions for the water crisis.<sup>3</sup>

The Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, Thabo Makgoba, summed up this response of Cape Town’s faith groups: “When the interfaith voice opposed apartheid as a movement, it worked. This is a struggle and a crisis. We need to be good stewards. It’s a beautiful opportunity for South Africans to come together. And therein lies our hope.”<sup>4</sup>

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2. Ibid. paragraph 28.

3. Ibid. paragraph 31.

4. Ibid, paragraph 34.

## QUESTION

WHAT RESPONSE ARE  
FAITH GROUPS CALLED  
TO MAKE?

## Reflection

“WARS OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY WILL BE  
FOUGHT OVER WATER.”

ISHMAEL SERAGELDIN, WORLD  
BANK VICE PRESIDENT OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

A CONCERN ECHOED  
BY POPE FRANCIS

... IT IS ALSO CONCEIVABLE  
THAT THE CONTROL  
OF WATER BY LARGE  
MULTINATIONAL  
BUSINESSES MAY BECOME  
A MAJOR SOURCE OF  
CONFLICT IN THIS CENTURY.

LAUDATO SI #31

### Water: Reflection (Genesis 26.17-22)

So Isaac departed from there and camped in the valley of Gerar and settled there. Isaac dug again the wells of water that had been dug in the days of his father Abraham; for the Philistines had stopped them up after the death of Abraham; and he gave them the names that his father had given them. But when Isaac's servants dug in the valley and found there a well of spring water, the herders of Gerar quarrelled with Isaac's herders, saying, 'The water is ours.' So he called the well Esek, because they contended with him. Then they dug another well and they quarrelled over that one also; so he called it Sitnah. He moved from there and dug another well, and they did not quarrel over it; so he called it Rehoboth, saying, 'Now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land.'

As Genesis tells of the struggles between ancient peoples over water, it reminds us that God's will is that water be available to all, not just the few. Isaac moves from Ezek ("contention") and Sitnah ("quarrel"), two wells of dispute, to a third place where he digs a further well which he calls Rehoboth ("broad space") This name reflects his recognition that land and water are the gift of God: "Now the Lord has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land." There is room for both Philistine and Israelite to flourish in the land; God has provided water for both.

Photo by Stefania Lucchesi, OP, ICWG member, Rome.

# Reflection

## On Being a Well

What makes this world so lovely  
is that somewhere it hides a well.  
Something lovely there is about a well  
so deep, un piped and real.  
Filled with buckets and buckets  
of that life-giving stuff...

Sometimes  
people are like wells  
deep and real  
natural (un piped)  
life-giving  
calm and cool  
refreshing.  
They bring out what is best in you  
They are like fountains of pure joy  
... Some experiences are like wells too  
People create them  
They are life-giving happenings  
They are redeeming experiences  
They are wells  
Wells of wonder and hope.

When you find a well  
and you will someday  
drink deeply of the gift within.

Then maybe soon you will discover  
that you have become  
a well for others.

*Macrina Wiederkeh*

—with special permission  
'Seasons of Your Heart,' Silver Burdett reflection  
can now be found in *Seasons of Your Heart*,  
Revised and Expanded (Harper: San Francisco).

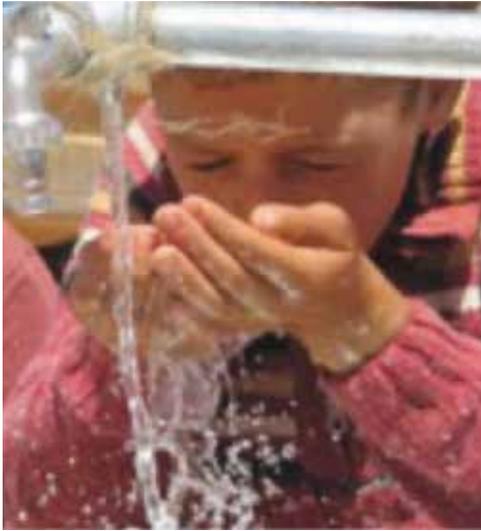


JESUS SAID TO HER, “IF  
YOU ONLY KNEW WHAT  
GOD IS OFFERING AND  
WHO IT IS THAT IS SAYING  
TO YOU: “GIVE ME A DRINK”,  
YOU WOULD HAVE BEEN  
THE ONE TO ASK AND  
HE WOULD HAVE GIVEN  
YOU LIVING WATER.”

JOHN 4:10

MANY BELIEVED IN JESUS  
ON THE STRENGTH OF THE  
WOMAN’S TESTIMONY.

JOHN 4:39



## 2. The SDGs

The document *Water and Sanitation* emphasises the obligation of governments to ensure developmental outcomes for the most vulnerable— reality which is compromised when the private sector takes responsibility for the provision of basic services. The document highlights the place of human rights in water<sup>1</sup>

The Catholic Church also challenges this position of the privatisation of water. Sean McDonagh, in his book, ‘On Care for our Common Home, *Laudato Si’*, the Encyclical of Pope Francis on the Environment’ quotes from the 2004 *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*:

“By its very nature water cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others. The distribution of water is traditionally among the responsibilities that fall to public agendas, since water is considered a public good. If water distribution is entrusted to the private sector it should still be considered a public good. The right to water, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right.” (no. 485) (McDonagh, pp. 80-81)<sup>2</sup>

ONE PERSON OF THE  
TRINITY ENTERED INTO  
THE CREATED COS-  
MOS, THROWING IN  
HIS LOT WITH IT, EVEN  
TO THE CROSS.

LAUDATO SI' # 99

1. Water and Sanitation: A People's Guide to SDG 6, p. 7.
2. Sean McDonagh, *On Care for our Common Home Laudato Si'* the Encyclical of Pope Francis on the Environment, with commentary by Sean McDonagh, Orbis Books, 2016, pp 80-81.

The SDGs have a deep basis in the faith tradition. The source of understanding of creation is located in scripture. Rather than domination over the earth we are enjoined to be good stewards of the earth (Genesis 1:28). Pope Francis stresses this when he quotes from the 1988 pastoral letter of the Philippine bishops, ‘What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?’

“God intended this land for us, his special creatures, but not so that we might destroy it and turn it into a wasteland ... as Christians we are called to watch over and protect the fragile world in which we live and all its peoples.” (No. 5)<sup>3</sup>

The issue of human rights and water is highlighted in *Laudato Si’* when Pope Francis speaks of the risks to human life when water is polluted. He says “dysentery and cholera are linked to inadequate hygiene and water supplies.” Even more reason for the SDG6 goal to come to pass, that is “to ensure everyone has access to adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene.”

McDonagh points out that *Laudato Si’* is addressed to all Christians and indeed, all humanity. He notes how Pope Francis widens the discussion of care for the earth into the sacramental nature of the Catholic Church. In his reflection on the Eucharist, the pope says, “the whole cosmos gives thanks to God, indeed the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love.” Further in the same paragraph (#236) he says the Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation.”<sup>4</sup>

Our scriptural understanding of water gives further symbolic depth in this sacramental expression of one of the most fundamental needs of our humanity and our creation. McDonagh’s book offers a very comprehensive commentary on the issue of fresh water including Water and Poverty and Water and World Peace.

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3. Ibid. Preface p. xvi.

4. *Laudato Si’*, Encyclical Letter on care for our common home, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2015, # 236.

CREATION CAN ONLY  
BE UNDERSTOOD AS  
A GIFT FROM THE OUT-  
STRETCHED HAND OF THE  
FATHER OF ALL, AND AS A  
REALITY ILLUMINATED BY  
THE LOVE WHICH CALLS  
US TOGETHER INTO UNI-  
VERSAL COMMUNION.

LAUDATO SI #76

## Reflection

...THE EUCHARIST IS  
ALWAYS IN SOME WAY  
CELEBRATED ON THE  
ALTAR OF THE WORLD.

LAUDATO SI #236

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CONSIDER THE CHARISM  
AND TRADITION OF OUR  
CONGREGATION. WHAT  
MIGHT IT OFFER IN THIS  
REFLECTION ON THE  
ISSUE OF WATER?

**“The whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed the Eucharist itself is an act of cosmic love.”** *Laudato Si* #236

By the mystery of this water and wine  
may we come to share in the divinity of Christ  
who humbled himself to share in our humanity.

In the Eucharist, Lord,  
we are made one with you.  
Teach us to recognise the holy  
in all creation...  
and to pour out our lives  
for our brothers and sisters...  
thus entering into communion.  
Amen.



# 3. THE WATER GOAL

## ‘The one sacred gift all religions share’

By Brian D McLaren, 2015

From Genesis 1:2 to Revelations 22:17, you’ll find one word written 722 times. It’s not just a word—it’s the singular symbol shared by all of the world’s religions. The symbol that plays a central role in our rituals. Religions have recognised its sacredness for millennia because it is the foundation for all life. The Dao De Jing, an ancient Chinese text, beautifully observes that it is the “void within the cup” that makes the cup useful—as a holder of water. From birth until death, our rituals may differ, but our commonality is as clear as clean water. Here are a few ways religions share similar beliefs about the sacred nature of water.

### Creation

*Hinduism:* According to the Rig-Veda, “... in the beginning everything was like the sea and without light.” Water (jal) carried a divine egg or seed from which the god Brahma was born—and it was he who raised the earth from the waters.

*Islam:* The Koran teaches that “we have created every living thing from water.”

*Judaism/Christianity:* In Genesis 1:2, the spirit or breath of God moves on the face of the waters and sets into motion the divine creation of the universe.

### Purification

*Shintoism:* Japan’s indigenous religion is based on the worship of innumerable deities believed to inhabit mountains, trees, rocks, springs and other aspects of nature. But wor-



“FROM BIRTH  
UNTIL DEATH, OUR  
RITUALS MAY  
DIFFER, BUT OUR  
COMMONALITY IS  
AS CLEAR AS  
CLEAN WATER.”

BRIAN D. MCLAREN

QUESTION  
RECALL AN  
EXPERIENCE  
WHEN YOU HAVE  
WITNESSED  
WATER BEING  
USED TO  
RITUALISE A  
SIGNIFICANT  
EVENT. WHAT  
INSIGHT CAME  
FROM THAT  
EXPERIENCE?

ship always begins with the all-important act of purification with water. Inside the many sacred shrines are troughs for rituals washing.

*Islam:* Wudu, or ritual washing, is done before each of the five daily prayers.

*Judaism:* Orthodox Jews observe the practice of mikveh, which is the ritual immersion into water to purify.

*Christianity:* Christians are baptised by water as a symbol of liberation.

### **Spiritual thirst**

*Christianity:* Water is spiritually thirst quenching. Jesus said to a Samaritan woman, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:13-14). Here, water fills everything it enters as God fills those who are immersed in God. Just as we need water to survive physically, we need God to survive spiritually.

### **Sacredness**

*Zoroastrianism:* Zoroastrians believe that pollution is evil and water that is pure is both sacred and a fundamental life element. Therefore, while water is used in rituals, by itself it is sacred and kept from being contaminated.

### **Immortality**

*Sikhism:* Sikhs go through an initiation rite as soon as they are old enough to understand the full commitment they are making to the faith. During the Amrit ceremony, hymns are recited from Sikh scripture, prayers are said and the principles of Sikhism are affirmed. Then the amrit, a mixture of sugar and water that has been stirred with a double edged sword, is prepared. The word amrit means “death is un-come”, and implies a state of immortality.

## Rebirth

*Christianity:* To be baptised as a Christian enacts or dramatizes the “spiritual rebirth” with water as the sacrament of initiation.

*Hinduism:* The Asthi Visajan is part of the last rites and is a ritual deeply associated with rebirth. After cremation, ashes are to be put into any of the holy river waters. This death in spiritual water ensures the soul of the dead a favourable rebirth.

*Bahá'í Faith:* Water is a key element for this monotheistic faith that emphasises spiritual unity for all humankind. In “Prayer, Meditation and the Devotional Attitude”, Abdu'l-Bahá writes, “The Almighty Lord is the provider of water, and its maker, and hath decreed that it be used to quench man’s thirst, but its use is dependent upon His Will. If it should not be in conformity with His Will, man is afflicted with a thirst which the oceans cannot quench.”

## Death

*Buddhism:* During funerals water is poured into a bowl and placed before the monks and the deceased. As it fills and pours over the edge, the monks recite, “As the rain fills the rivers and overflows into the ocean, so likewise may what is given here reach the departed.” From birth until death, water brings people together around meaningful religious rituals.

Because water is essential for life, it is our sacred duty to make sure that clean and drinkable water is freely available for all. .. To give the gift of water is to give the holy gift of life.

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*Printed with permission from Brian McLaren, “Water in Other Religious Traditions.”*



*Angelo—Acquasantiera at Santa Maria Degli Angeli, Roma.*

WATER, OIL, FIRE AND  
COLOURS ARE TAKEN UP IN  
ALL THEIR SYMBOLIC POWER  
AND INCORPORATED INTO  
OUR ACT OF PRAISE.  
LAUDATO SI #235

## Reflection

SOIL, WATER,  
MOUNTAINS:  
EVERYTHING IS,  
AS IT WERE, A  
CARESS OF GOD  
LAUDATO SI #84

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QUESTION  
TO GIVE THE  
GIFT OF WATER IS  
TO GIVE THE HOLY  
GIFT OF LIFE.”  
HOW DO I  
UNDERSTAND THIS  
STATEMENT?

### Pay Attention ...

Pay heed to the water, air and earth:  
creation's wonderful bounty.  
They are harmed for the want  
of being listened to:  
They cry... and too few hear;  
they slowly die...and too few grieve.

And yet  
through those who give attention  
who reach out with reverence  
to touch, embrace and tend;  
through those who marvel, wonder, kneel  
and joyfully splash the water,  
healing comes  
and there are kernels of hope  
for the future of 'our common home'  
and its sacred waters.

Be still, be aware,  
be just, be fair...  
Know that I am God!

# 4. Red Flags

## Indigenous peoples: Guardians of waters and territories

*By Br. Rodrigo Péret, ofm*

*Franciscan Ecology and Solidarity Action/Churches and Mining Network*

The 2018 edition of the UN World Water Development Report (WWDR2018) states: “Indigenous and tribal peoples care for about 22 percent of the Earth’s surface and protect almost 80 percent of the planet’s biodiversity, while they constitute only about 5 percent of the world’s population (ILO, 2017)”. Indigenous peoples and their traditional knowledge, ways of life, worldview and spirituality are fundamental to the care of water and its management, as well as to the creation of resilient societies. On November 5, 2015, the mud spilled from the criminal breakup of the tailings dam of Samarco mining company (Vale and BHP Billinton), in southeastern Brazil, destroyed Doce River basin. There were more than 55 million cubic meters of iron ore waste, impacting about 663 kilometers of rivers, neighboring communities, and cities. For the Krenak indigenous people, who live on their shores, their way of life and soul were affected—the river is sacred. “All the processes of our lives were made through the river, hunting, fishing, and our community. Everything was done within the waters of the Doce River—it was our Watú, which in our language means running river. Today, we do not have that anymore. We cannot live the processes of our culture because our Watú is dead”, said Shirley Krenak at the Churches and Mining Network Seminar on Ecotheology and Mining (2017), in Mariana, Brazil. “May all the spirits of nature strengthen us. Our suffering is great in the face of so much evil played in our Watú. Watú, the water



“IT IS CRUCIAL  
THAT ALL HUMANITY  
HEAR BOTH THE  
CRY OF THE EARTH  
AND THE CRY OF  
THE POOR.”  
LAUDATO SI’



Djukurnã Shirley Krenak, a Krenak woman, affected by the breakup of Samarco's tailings dam in Mariana, Brazil. (Photo supplied by Br. Rodrigo)

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that flowed and purified us, cleanse us of all the diseases of the kray krenton. May Mother Nature purify our spirits. I am a Krenak native. I am proud to say. I am a tree trunk. I am strong for good, cut all my branches thinking that I would die, but the sun and rain came and gave me life to live." (Krenak Prayer) "Watú kwen" (Watú died). The river is more than a food source from where fish came to eat and water to drink, wash things and bathing. It is sacred, where the Krenak perform their religious rituals. Watu "It's like a relative. You feel like you've lost a mother, a father", said Douglas Krenak. In March, 2018, at the Alternative World Water Forum (FAMA), leadership of indigenous peo-

ples and traditional communities from different regions of Brazil launched a dossier on Violations of Traditional Territories and Crimes Against Water: "We cry for help from our woods, fields, forests, and waters that have been violated by practices that lead to contamination, such as toxic waste from mining activities, fracking, untreated sewage spillage, deforestation practices, cattle ranching and monoculture that destroy nature and the springs dry up murdered". At FAMA 2018, there were countless reports on violations of nature and people's rights, on crimes committed and its impacts, on struggles, challenges and alternatives for the protection of life for this and future generations.

In the Amazon, there is an abundance of water and conflicts. The region became a new hydropower frontier, as a result of commodification of nature and the need of energy for many mega mining projects. "They want to kill us with thirst, with hunger, and with hatred, they want to exterminate the native people from this land. They want to contaminate everything, our lands, our waters, our lives. But our warriors, our enchanted and gods will not allow that to happen. We denounce these death projects and announce our conviction that we will not allow", stated Alessandra Munduruku, one of the leaders of the Munduruku people at Tapajós River region, speaking at FAMA

2018 against the construction of São Luiz Hydroelectric Power Plant. She denounced the Brazilian government and multinationals corporations. Tapajós Complex is a set of five hydroelectric plants that will completely change the Tapajós River basin, affecting at least 1,979 square kilometers. Under risk is the Guarani Aquifer System which covers an area of 1.2 million square kilometers in South America, 68 percent of which is in Brazil, 20.8 percent in Argentina, 8.1 percent in Paraguay, and 3,1 percent in Uruguay. Negotiations to privatize the aquifer involve the 2030 WRG (2030 Water Resources Group), a transnational corporation consortium with the participation of the World Bank group that intends to privatize water from developing countries.

The FAMA 2018 Indigenous Peoples and Traditional Communities Final Declaration, mentioned above, ends with a great witness: “Our traditions teach us how to take care and to live with the living nature, and this is what we have always done, and this is what we want to teach, that a careful and balanced development model is possible, where lives are not destroyed.

We, the Peoples and Traditional Communities, are not only giving voice to humans, but to beings, humans and nature, who live and who have this close relationship with the earth/waters, as one body. Therefore, our resistance is based on our awareness of the sacred bond that connects us with the waters, inseparable from life and determined by an ancestral, current and future relationship.

*“Killing the waters is killing us! We fight for the life of us, our children and grandchildren”.*

“KILLING THE WATERS  
IS KILLING US! WE FIGHT  
FOR THE LIFE OF US,  
OUR CHILDREN AND  
GRANDCHILDREN”.

FROM “INDIGENOUS PEOPLES:  
GUARDIANS OF WATERS  
AND TERRITORIES”



## Reflection

### Water blessing (Indigenous grandmothers)

Prepare a bowl of clean water or stand beside a body of water.

Pray for the water in apology (for polluting and disrespect). Then offer prayers of love, gratitude and respect.

Raise both of your hands towards the water—your energy will be projected from your heart into the water through your hands.

Your whole intention should be that the vibrations, which now fill the water, will spread to the waters all over our Mother Earth.

You may also add your own prayer over the water, meditation, chanting, music, songs, dancing, and so on intending the same purpose.

Pour a little bit of the water on their hand, with a loving thought, sprinkle the water away from you (as in spreading Seeds), then drink the water, with a feeling of gratitude.

We thank all those who join us as we pray for the life of water for our future generations.”

A HINDU PRAYER  
OH! MOTHER EARTH,  
WHO HAS THE OCEAN AS  
CLOTHES AND MOUNTAINS  
AND FORESTS ON HER  
BODY, I BOW TO YOU.

A BUDDHIST PRAYER  
WATER COMES FROM HIGH  
MOUNTAIN SOURCES.  
WATER RUNS DEEP  
IN THE EARTH.  
MIRACULOUSLY, WATER  
COMES TO US AND  
SUSTAINS ALL LIFE.  
MY GRATITUDE IS  
FILLED TO THE BRIM.



Photo by Stefania Lucchesi OP

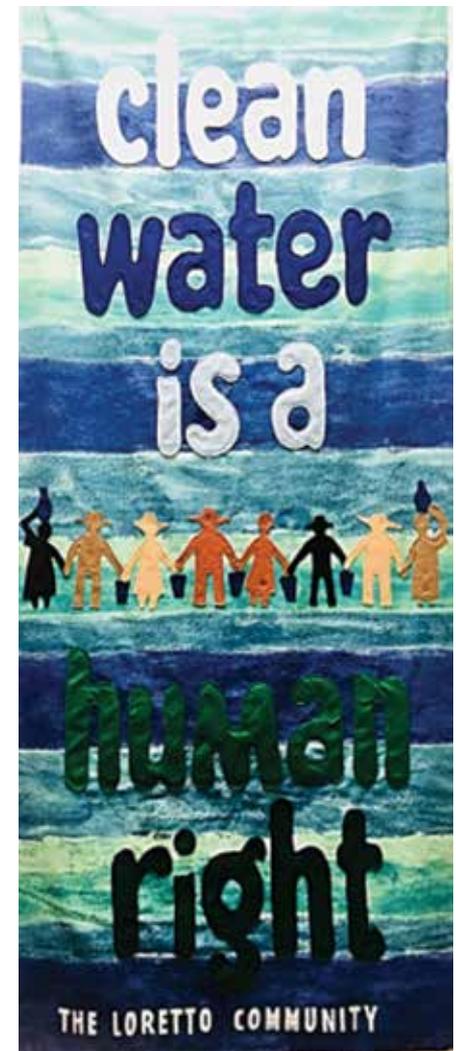
# 5. Litmus Test

The discussion of Catholic Social Teaching comes under the category of 'litmus test' because it provides a robust litmus test of accountability from a faith-based view of the issue of water and sanitation. A strong tradition of theological thought has gone into this basic right to safe and clean water. As always, the faith perspective comes from a scriptural base and there are many references to water in both the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

Frank Turner SJ shows how in Catholic Social Teaching, a more complex understanding of water has developed first, by its meaning for the environment and human life and then through several lenses related to our global society. These include water as a human right, water as a common good and water related to conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Turner describes first of all, the dichotomy of water's capacity for both destruction and life. This is reflected both in the scriptures and in our present world where examples abound of droughts, flooding and rising sea levels etc. Also in our blessed and broken world are examples of where water is essential to fertility and growth and where symbolically, it represents new life in baptism.

Catholic Social Teaching responds to the negative outcomes of this duality by stating clearly that safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right. That social doctrine is quoted from the 'Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church' #485, and is already noted in Section 2 'The SDG's'. The same source also says, "Inadequate access to safe drinking water affects the well-being of huge numbers of people and it is often the cause of disease, suffering, conflicts, poverty and even



Courtesy of Beth Blissman, UN-NGO Representative.

## QUESTION

HOW DOES THE SOCIAL  
TEACHING OF THE  
CHURCH ENRICH MY  
UNDERSTANDING OF AN  
ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUE  
SUCH AS WATER?

death. For a suitable solution to this problem, it must be set in context to establish moral criteria based precisely on the value of all life and the respect for the rights and dignity of all human beings." #484<sup>2</sup>

Catholic Social Teaching often uses the term the 'common good' to denote fairness and equality for all. In terms of water, Turner quotes Pope Benedict XVI's letter for the 2010 World Day of Peace, especially paragraph 12. He also refers to Pope John Paul's statement in *Centesimus Annus* 1991, §40, where he argues for the defence of 'collective and qualitative needs which cannot be satisfied by market mechanisms'.<sup>3</sup> Turner also shows the concern of Catholic Social Teaching about the relationship between water and conflict.

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1. Frank Turner SJ, 'Water in Catholic Social Teaching', 31 August 2013 [www.ecojesuit.com/water-in-catholic-social-teaching/5691/](http://www.ecojesuit.com/water-in-catholic-social-teaching/5691/)
  2. Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004, #484
  3. Turner, III. "Water as a common good"

## Water Scripture References

The earth was a formless void and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. Genesis 1:2

He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. Psalm 23

You visit the earth and water it; you greatly enrich it... Psalm 65:9

With joy you will draw water from the wells of salvation. Isaiah 12:3

I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground. Isaiah 44:3

Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters! Isaiah 55:1

Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left. Exodus 14:21-2

And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple—truly, I tell you, none of these will lose their reward. Matthew 10:42

Jesus laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him. John 13:5

And let everyone who is thirsty come. Let anyone who wishes take the water of life as a gift. Revelation 22:1



Rupnik mosaic, Lenno Chapel. Photo by Stefania Lucchesi, OP.

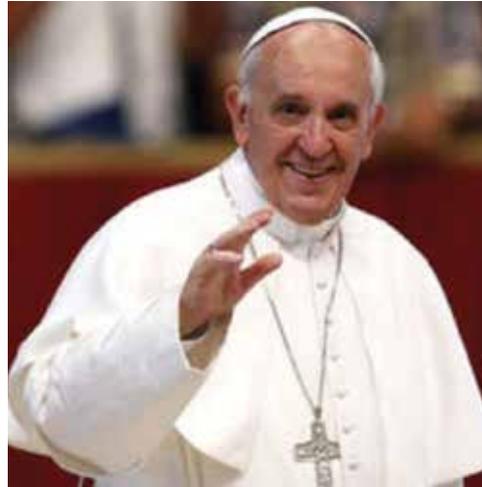
# 6. Advocacy

PRAISED BE TO  
YOU, MY LORD,  
THROUGH SISTER  
WATER,  
WHO IS VERY USEFUL  
AND HUMBLE,  
PRECIOUS AND CHASTE.

CANTICLE OF THE  
CREATURES –ST. FRANCIS

22

QUESTION  
WHAT DO I  
UNDERSTAND BY  
THE TERM ‘INTEGRAL  
ECOLOGY’?



On October 24, 2017, Pope Francis urged the participants of the international conference on “Water and Climate: comparison between the great rivers of the world” to a “joint commitment to raising awareness among the international community of the urgent problems faced by the world’s most important river basins.” He stated that this should lead to practical solutions which would highlight the need for “an increasingly integrated approach to the promotion of development and dissemination of a ‘culture of care’”. We recognise this theme from *Laudato Si’* (#231). Pope Francis insists

that access to water is, in fact, one of the inalienable rights of every human being, since it is a prerequisite for the exercise of many of the other human rights. (LS#30)

The conference on water and climate in relation to the rivers, is a concrete example of how the approach of *Laudato Si’* can be applied to specific issues of care for our earth and the cost to those who are poorest, when this approach is ignored.

Pope Francis encourages a global approach which takes into account all our society’s systems. In the case of water usage he says, “This shows that the problem of water is partly an educational and cultural issue.” (LS#30) Indeed *Laudato Si’* highlights the term ‘integral ecology’ which clearly includes the integrity of water usage.

# Reflection

## Water prayer

Loving Creator of water  
on which all life depends,  
we thank you for the showers  
which water and soften the earth,  
bringing forth springs, streams,  
rivers, lakes and oceans  
and all that comes to  
life within and beside them.

We thank you for the running water in our  
taps.

And we pray for our brothers and sisters  
in countries where water is in short supply...  
where women and young girls walk miles  
seeking water  
and the earth is unforgiving and barren.

Forgive us when we waste  
the precious gift of water  
and when we take it for granted.

We thank you for clean water.  
And we pray for those whose water is  
contaminated and brings sickness  
and death. Forgive us for allowing this to  
happen!

Thank you for the rain and for rainbows,  
sign of hope, promise and love.

And we promise to speak and act for  
the common good—

to reaffirm the human right to safe  
drinking water and sanitation  
and to safeguard our natural  
resources... for our children  
and for future generations.

Amen



Photo by Stefania Lucchesi, OP.

## QUESTIONS

IN WHAT WAYS  
DO I RECOGNIZE  
WATER AS A  
SYMBOL OF  
GOD'S GIFT AND  
GENEROSITY?

HOW MIGHT WE  
BE CALLED TO  
OFFER WATER—  
AND OTHER GIFTS  
OF GOD—TO  
THOSE WHO  
THIRST OR ARE IN  
ANY KIND OF  
NEED?

**As we use this document perhaps we can touch into some, or all, of the following 'prayer moments'. Both water and prayer sustain our lives ... so as we act for water justice we are also called to pray for it! Please use the prayers in conjunction with the various articles and the case study. Together may they bring renewed reverence for the sacred gift of water ... and a deep sense of gratitude towards our Creator God.**

*Gratitude:* Begin by thanking our Creator for the wonderful resource of water... sacred, and gifted to all!

*Awareness:* Picture in your mind your favourite body of water. It may be the ocean or a river, stream or lake. Notice its colour, smell, taste, sound, movement. Be aware of what is carried by the water. Become one with the water! Then picture an area of water contaminated and polluted or inaccessible to the local people...and ask "Can this be right?"

*Forgiveness:* Ask forgiveness for the ways we abuse God's gift of water—personally, as consumers, part of a nation, and as part of the global community.

*Others:* Bring before God all those who suffer because of our actions and over consumption.

*Blessing:* Bless yourself with water... and allow that blessing to flow out from you to those areas where water needs healing. Allow the blessing to touch the lives of water carriers, defenders and all who seek ways to cleanse the planet's waters.

*Action:* How we respond will depend on where we live! Some of us live in countries characterised by consumerism, over indulgence and waste, others in countries where access to this basic essential is difficult or denied. Actions may include:

- Developing a critical consciousness... being an educated consumer.
- Not using one-use plastic items.
- Not buying bottled water in countries where tap water is drinkable—Try it for a month!
- Conserving water in the home.
- Speaking out... being an advocate of water for all... in all countries.

Whatever you do, do something! We're sure you've heard the following story:

There was an important job to be done. Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it, but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry about that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it, but Nobody realised that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody could have done.

## Sample Prayer Service

In the name of the Father who brought forth water from the rock,  
the Son who is the Living Water  
and the Spirit who hovered over the waters  
at the beginning of creation...  
we gather.

**Suggested Music:** CD "Quiet My Soul" (Copyright Monica Brown  
and Emmaus Productions, used with special permission)

- Like the deer that yearns for running streams,  
So my soul is longing.
- Waters of life, come wash over me,  
Let my soul drink from your wellspring, O God.  
Waters of life, come wash over me,  
Quench deep within the thirst of my soul.

*B. Hurd:* The water I shall give,  
As the deer longs; flow river, flow.

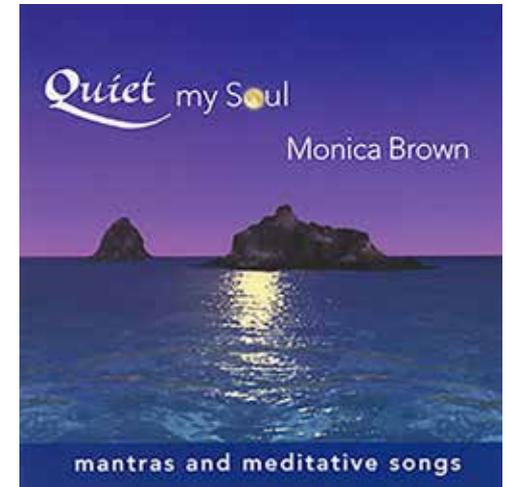




Photo by Stefania Lucchesi, OP.

### Opening Reflection:

At the very dawn of creation  
 God's Spirit breathed on the waters,  
 making them the wellspring of holiness.

Water is everywhere there is life—  
 from the early morning dew  
 to seasonal rains,  
 to oceans, seas, lakes and rivers.

Every day we are offered multiple opportunities  
 to remember, thank and bless  
 our connection to water...

Let us become mindful and remember our oneness with water.

*We reflect on these opportunities in silence*

### Symbolic gesture or action

**Suggestions:** reverently pouring water into a bowl, signing ourselves with water, renewing of baptismal promises

**Scripture Reading:** Psalm 62/63:1

Oh God, you are my God, for you I long;  
 for you my soul is thirsting.

My body pines for you

like a dry weary land without water.

*Alternatively you might choose one of the Scripture passages on pp. 20-21 or another of your choice.*

**Leader:** We remember the waters of the Red Sea , parting to reveal a safe path...

**All: We praise and thank you, for you are a God of deliverance.**

**Leader:** We remember the waters pouring forth from the rock...

**All: We praise and thank you for you are a God of gracious provision.**

**Leader:** We remember the healing qualities of the waters of Siloam...

**All: We praise and thank you for you are a God of ceaseless compassion.**

**Leader:** We remember the waters of baptism and the River Jordan...

**All: We praise and thank you for you are a God of Transformation.**

**All: Today we honour and worship you, God of deliverance, provision, ceaseless compassion and transformation. And we pray that we might reflect these attributes more faithfully to a world crying out for freedom, justice, love and change. Amen.**



# World Water Day, March 22

## Prayers of intercession

Creator God whose Spirit hovered over the face of the water at creation, we pray for all who suffer from lack of water today:  
Teach us how to work towards a just and peaceable sharing of water among nations and peoples. (*Water Crisis*)

**Response:** Creator God, hear our prayer and give us your deep love for the whole of Creation.

Pour down your Spirit upon those responsible for decisions concerning  
the purity and availability of water across our earth.

Help them to discover creative ways of providing enough clean  
water for all peoples and for all that lives and grows on our earth. (*Water Goal*)

**Response:** Creator God, hear our prayer and give us your deep love for the whole of Creation.

Your Son called himself 'the Living Water'.

Help us to solve, not add to, the problems of drought, flooding,  
sanitation and disease so that all may share the gifts of water and life. (*Litmus Test*)

**Response:** Creator God, hear our prayer and give us your deep love for the whole of Creation.

Merciful God, forgive us for squandering, polluting and commodifying water. Free  
us from our misuse and waste of this most precious gift. (*Red Flags*)

**Response:** Creator God, hear our prayer and give us your deep love for the whole of Creation.

God who led your people safely through the desert, we pray for all the women and girls who carry water for miles,  
and whose only supply is often contaminated. May clean, safe water be available to every living creature. (*SDGs*)

**Response:** Creator God, hear our prayer and give us your deep love for the whole of Creation.

We pray for all who put their lives at risk as they stand with communities who struggle for their land and forests, rivers and springs. May we be generous in supporting those individuals, communities, agencies and organisations throughout the world working for water justice. (*Advocacy*)

**Response:** Creator God, hear our prayer and give us your deep love for the whole of Creation.



# Water Creed

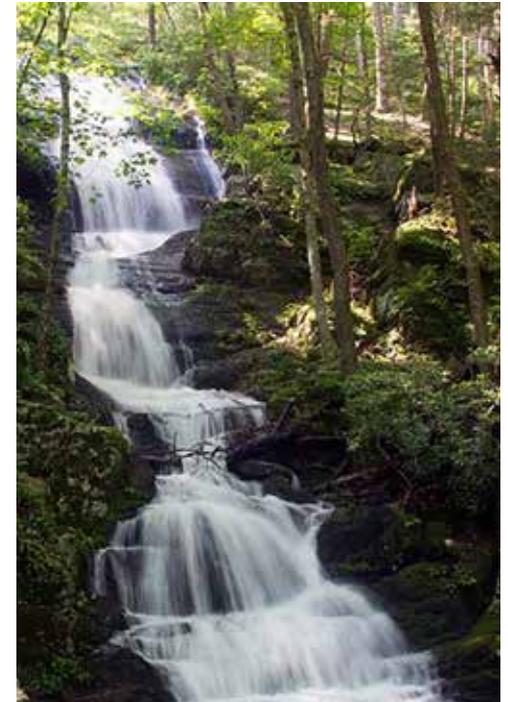
We believe in God  
who has created and is creating  
and who breathes life and purpose  
into all of creation.

We believe in Jesus,  
Son of God,  
Living Water,  
Bread of Life,  
Our Way and Truth,  
Light and Love.

We believe in the Spirit  
who danced over the waters  
at the dawn of creation..  
and who calls us to join  
in that dance of joy  
with the whole of creation today!

We believe water is a precious gift  
for the benefit of all,  
not a commodity  
for the benefit of the few.

We believe water teaches us to thirst for justice,  
peace, reconciliation, love and hope.



# Conclusion



**W**e are hoping that this booklet will open us up to a deeper appreciation of water by calling us to pay attention and to express a deep respect and gratitude for this most precious resource.

Observing water is a meditation in itself. Standing beside a running stream or watching the ebb and flow of the ocean's tide can bring us to a sense of calm and make us feel refreshed and renewed and grateful.

It is no surprise that peoples of various cultures and religions have found deep spiritual meanings in water—it communicates the sacred values of life, cleansing, refreshment, healing and redemption.

May this deeper appreciation inform our actions.

# Notes





JPIC COMMISSION  
Via Aurelia 476  
10065 Rome, Italy  
Phone: +39 06 662 2929  
Cell. +39 340 06 11596  
or +39 331 434 8103  
[www.jpicroma.com](http://www.jpicroma.com)