

The **MAST** *Journal*

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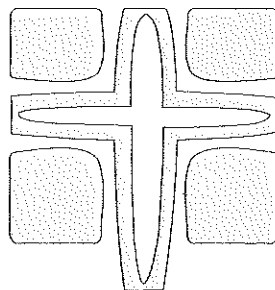
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Dear Sisters, Associates, Companions and Friends of Mercy,

The theme for this issue was proposed two years ago by members of the MAST Editorial Board, and possible contributors were suggested at the annual MAST meeting. The outcome involved my discovery of a hidden treasure – the quiet, persistent ways in which many Mercies, as well as members of other religious congregations have been involved in this specific area of environmental justice, working to raise consciousness about the use and misuse of the world's water.

Several Mercies, asked for a contribution, had to decline because of other ministerial involvements. This issue's offerings thus suggest that concern about water and the environment is widespread among us, though not everyone who has something important to say was able to express herself here. But the theme of concern itself for water that urges many Mercies and women religious to act is represented.

I am grateful to Sisters who gave me leads about who to ask, and where I might find contributions that should be collected and re-published here. Susan Severin, R.S.M., of the Institute Justice Office, also gave me some suggestions and e-mail addresses. I was made aware of women religious who have spoken to this issue—those I didn't know – through a friend who served in the African missions, Maureen Sinnott, O.S.F., Ph.D. She was the one who recommended Dolores Barling, S.N.J.M. Mary Bilderback, R.S.M., sent me not only her own introductory essay, but the whole book of resources created by ROW – Religious on Water – representing several women's congregations on the east coast. Many unidentified streams and currents blend in the Atlantic. Some of those anonymously written essays from 2005 are re-published here, a testament of what the sisterhood has collaborated in offering as a service to us all.

Kathleen Pritty, R.S.M, the Northeast Justice Coordinator, sent me a number of texts, including the Northeast community's corporate stand on water, a model of simplicity and conviction. Part of this collection included the essay by Gratia L'Esperance, R.S.M., which she revised and updated for *The MAST Journal*, including the graph on bottled water. Constance Kozel, R.S.M., gave permission to re-print her poetic essay originally published in 1996 for the Dallas regional community.

Kathleen Connolly, R.S.M., returned from several months in the Sudan, after volunteering her services as a social-worker and health-care teacher with tribal women and school girls. Having read her blog which informs readers about the good work of Mercy Beyond Borders, I asked her to write about her experience of women and water. Her eloquent narrative is the result.

I attended a meeting of the Society of Christian Ethics in San Jose, California early in 2010. One of the presenters was Professor Christine Gudorf, who gave a paper on water in western and Islamic societies. She is a well-respected academic in the field of social ethics. When I asked if I could edit and publish part of her paper, and explained the audience, she suggested another paper which she had presented at the American Academy of Religion a few months earlier. I am grateful for her kind permission to publish her professional, but accessible "Ethical Issues and Water Privatization."

This writer was teaching a parish scripture study course on the Gospel of John during the editing process for this issue. Given the water theme, it seemed timely to compose some remarks on the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman at the Well. I am grateful to the Thursday morning class of Ascension Parish in Saratoga, California, for being receptive to some of the thoughts that were ground-tested with them.

Finally, I re-read the essay of Mary Clare Yates, R.S.M., "Seeking God: Prayer and Nature" which was originally published in 1980 in an internally-circulated booklet called *Sisters of Mercy...Seeking God*, compiled by Emily George, R.S.M. through the Frances Warde Study Center in Benton Harbor, Michigan. This belongs to a category of Mercy writing I am calling, under the title of a previous issue, "Wisdom That Endures." *MAST Journal* will continue to publish essays under this heading. I am quite confident that we won't run out of contributions that belong here!

Yours,

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.
Editor, *The MAST Journal*



Water and the Harshness of Life in the Sudan

Kathleen Connolly, R.S.M.

About fourteen years ago, two cousins aged 9 and 10 were watching their cattle and goats with the other Sudanese village youth about two or so miles from where they lived with their parents. Suddenly, they heard gunfire coming from the village. Their village was being attacked by the Sudanese army. The boys had been trained to run away should this happen. So run they did, along with the other boys herding their animals.

They ran for several months and hundreds of miles until they reached Ethiopia and eventually, the Shirkole refugee camp. On their way they experienced hunger and thirst to the extreme. They watched as one of their group was killed by a lion. They saw some of the boys eaten by crocodiles. Others drowned in the rivers as they tried to swim across.

For six years the survivor boys lived by their wits in the refugee camp. They had to fight just to get the food allotted to them by the United Nations. The older boys would try to take their food rations from them. When I met these young men, they were 15 and 16 years old. One could not tell from their manner all that they had suffered. I allowed myself to be lulled by the apparent calm and peace the boys exuded because I did not want to know any of the particulars which had brought them to this country.

After almost three years as a case manager for these and other youth from Africa, I felt called to know their story more deeply. I felt a desire and commitment to live in the Sudan for a time. I wanted to experience something of their sun-dried land, their rich and mysterious culture, their way of seeing and understanding themselves and their people.

In January, 2009 I flew to Nairobi, Kenya on my way to the small village of Narus in South Sudan in response to this felt call. I had just quit my job as a social worker with Catholic Charities in San Jose, California where I worked with these refugee African youth who had been placed in foster care.

In Narus, I taught hygiene and nutrition to grades 7 and 8 at St. Bakhita Girls School. In September a program funded by Mercy Action for the Toposa tribes women was begun. I trained two Sudanese women to help me teach the Toposa classes in basic hygiene and nutrition along with a health component. When I left to return home, they continued to teach in my stead.

I lived in the Diocese of Torit compound in a *tukul* (a room built in a circle) which had a toilet but no water. The *tukul* had cement floor and walls, and a thatch roof. I showered in a communal shower stall which usually had enough water to get the job done. I ate breakfast with the Maryknoll sisters, Madeline McHugh and Theresa Baldini in their convent and had dinner with Mary the Mother of God Ugandan sisters, Edvine, Susan Clare, and Agnes, in their convent. These sisters were a great support to me.

Our meals consisted of goat meat, chicken, rice and beans, greens and *ugali* (maize) along with fruit when it was available. Our drinking water was boiled. There was no refrigeration as we only had the generator on at night for about two hours. This was not long enough to keep any food cool so we ate in one day whatever was cooked at noon.

My short stay, less than one year, in South Sudan has helped me to see how these teenage youth are stunned by the noise, the fast pace, the modern conveniences and excess at every level when they arrive in the United States from the refugee camps where they have been living. They are shocked by the instant verbal and physical signs of familiarity between and among children and adults, boys and girls. They cannot believe the cavalier attitude of American children who seem to take their education and abundant opportunities for granted. In this land of plenty, the supply of water and the flagrant use of it baffles them.

In Sudan, as in most of the countries in East Equatorial Africa, water is a sometimes scarce and

always a precious life sustainer. Where I lived the tribes-people make use of underground water. Non- governmental groups and the Government of South Sudan dig bore holes to access this water.

Barefoot women and girls carry jerry cans of water weighing thirty or more pounds, at least twice a day to their villages, covering anywhere from two to six miles round trip each time. Men bathe but women do not. The men believe that a woman who washes is getting herself presentable for a lover.

Some of the watering places collect water in large pools nearby so that goats and cattle can be brought there to drink. The cattle's excrement, along with human urine, mix in these small pools and leach their way back into the water table. Thus, those who drink this water or who bathe in it are subject to hepatitis, worms and parasites which carry debilitating diseases.

The Nile River begins in Uganda and flows through all of Sudan where other streams and rivers feed into it. There has been no damming of this river or its main tributaries as it would affect its flow into Egypt. South Sudan is, therefore, seriously wanting in water for drinking, irrigation and electricity.

Water... Africa... southern Sudan... bore holes... drought... aridity... sparse vegetation... dry riverbeds cracking underfoot... all this describes the area of South Sudan where I lived. You learn about water from its lack as shown in lean cattle, thin tribesmen, and stifling heat. There is a thirst you can see in the trees, in the rocks and on the faces of the people. Plants disappear with no trace left of them. Trees and shrubs look so very tired. You wonder if anything will ever grow again or would even want to grow should water come to their rescue. Why should it go through the agony that drought brings? The wind and sun have sucked all moisture from that which struggles to retain what little it has – wrapping it all up in skin and hide, bark and soil.

Yet for all this, the sky remains a robin's egg blue, the clouds pillow-fluffed while you can see the mountains of Kenya miles away with their pencil thin outlines drawn on the horizon. At night the stars crowd the sky. You feel you can

reach out and pull them down.

Life is tenuous and those living it – humans, animals, plants – instinctively guard against any diminishment as best they can. Their self-reliance is tested. How sure are they that they will be able to find a meal? That water will always be available? That some parasite or wild animal or toxic insect will not get to them and drain life's juices from their bodies?

Water is synonymous with life and pastoralists are always looking for new sources for their cattle. The Toposa tribesmen with whom I worked live off the land, herding their cattle and planting maize and sorghum as the rains allow.

Though many tribes-people are animists, they do believe in a being, or beings, who monitor their lives and the natural resources which they use. These beings reward and punish and need to be appeased periodically. The Toposa are close to the earth. They respect it believing the rains will come and their few crops will grow to harvest. God appears to them in sun and storm, cattle and crops, family and village community.

The immediacy of God in their lives makes this same God more immediate in mine. It is difficult to convey how "in your face" this God is to me when I live in the present and listen to God's life throbbing around me in the bush. As precious as water is, it is one of many indications in nature of God's loving concern for all of creation and of the Toposa people especially.

For just as from the heavens the rain and snow come down and do not return there till they have watered the earth, making it fertile and fruitful, giving seed to them that sow and bread to them that eat, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will achieving the end for which I sent it. (Isaiah 55: 10-14)

These verses from Isaiah can lose some of their immediacy and force for some hearers. I doubt this has happened to the Toposa. God has sent this same word about water to them, just as God has sent it to those who profess Christianity. The Toposa, though, may be more in touch with the primordial beat of God's action in their lives.



Water is a Human Right and Public Good

Dolores Barling, S.N.J.M.

"I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink." (Mt. 25:25) These words of Jesus are pertinent to our lives in the twenty first century because of all the water we have on this planet only 2.5% is freshwater and, while the demand for safe, drinkable water is skyrocketing, the supply is diminishing. Changing weather patterns are causing desertification, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa. Multinational corporations are gobbling up water rights. Nations realize the next wars will be fought not over oil but over water. Worldwide the outlook is grim and getting grimmer, while more and more people say "Give me something to drink."

The right to water is based in the right to life which the Catholic Church staunchly upholds. *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 69, states: The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, to the Third World Water forum in Kyoto, March 2003, is well-worth quoting:

The earth and all that it contains are for the use of every human being and all peoples. This principle of the universal destination of the goods of creation confirms that people and countries, including future generations have the right to fundamental access to those goods which are necessary for their development. *Water is such a*

"God destined the earth and all it contains for all people so that all created things would be shared fairly by all mankind under the guidance of justice tempered by charity."

common good of humankind. The few, with the means to control, cannot destroy or exhaust this resource, which is destined for the use of all.

There is a growing movement to formally adopt a human right to water. The dignity of the human person mandates its acknowledgement. Without water, life is threatened, with the result being death. *The right to water is thus an inalienable right.*

A third source of teaching on the issue of water as a human right comes to us in the Message of John Paul II for Brazil's 2004 Fraternity Campaign: As everyone knows, water is immensely important for the earth: without this

precious element, it would rapidly become an arid desert, a place of hunger and thirst where people, animals and plants would be condemned to death...As a gift from God, water is a vital element essential to survival; thus, *everyone has a right to it.*

From these three church sources we grasp two essential points: water is a human right and a common good. In the eyes of the church each and every person, whether rich or poor, has a right to sufficient water for life.



The Worldwide Water Crisis

Dolores Barling, S.N.J.M.

*When the poor and the needy seek water,
I will open rivers on the bare heights and
fountains in the midst of valleys;
I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the
dry land springs of water.
Is. 41:17-18*

The first article in this series presented the Catholic Church's teaching about water as a human right and public good. The facts presented below (taken from the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary Corporate Stand on Water)

focus on more particular aspects of the worldwide water crisis and involvement by the United Nations

Worldwide Reality

- Access to clean water in sufficient amounts is absolutely essential for human life and health.
- Freshwater is a limited resource: only 2.5 percent of earth's total water supply is clean enough for human consumption and less than 1 percent of that water is usable in a renewable fashion. *United Nations*.
- The world's finite supply of accessible freshwater is so polluted, diverted and depleted that millions of people and other species are deprived of water simply to live and we are witnesses to this in every country where we are living.
- A child dies every 8 seconds from a disease caused by polluted water. *United Nations*
- Lack of access to adequate freshwater increases the likelihood of violent conflict between nations. *"Water Wars" by Vandana Shiva.*
- The privatization of water services and the marketing of fresh water for profit typically decrease accessibility of clean, affordable water for impoverished persons and countries.
- The UN has proclaimed 2005-2015 as the International Decade for Action – Water for Life, the goal being "a greater focus on water-related issues" in an effort to halve the proportion of people who are unable to reach or afford safe drinking water and who do not have access to basic sanitation.
- Catholic Social Teaching ... calls us to take personal and collective responsibility for safeguarding the world's freshwater and ensuring its equitable distribution.



For the complete version of "Water as a Human Right and Public Good", go to www.snjm.org

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Religious on Water: Booklet on Water 2005

Introduction: "Water of Life"

Mary Bilderback, R.S.M.

As Divinity continuously pours forth into a Universe which is becoming more and more aware of its own elegant unity, we respond with gratitude and reverence by seeking to place ourselves in harmony with that endless flow of love and goodness, the source and substance of all life.

Empirically validating mystical insights and the wisdom of indigenous peoples, contemporary cosmology and physics have demonstrated that the Universe is a single, on-going event. All that comes into existence arises out of the same cosmic process and takes shape in the same physical substance.

In such a Universe where magnificent diversity thrives in mysterious communion, to think of "environmental" issues as separate from any meaningful consideration of any part of the web of life, creates an illusion we now recognize is devastating to the present vitality and the future of the planet.

Deep relationship implies deep responsibility. We must understand what it means to live in right relationship with all creation, and to act sustainably within the biorhythms of our bioregions.

There is just one water on Earth – disconnected only by the interference of human activity in an ancient choreography that cycles oceans to aquifers.

As far back as 4.6 billion years ago, before there was life to thirst for it, water spent its days with the sun, creating the oceans, rivers, and intricate waterways coursing the planet. It spent

its nights with the moon, fine tuning the rhythms of the tides. Together these cosmic characters transformed a planet of rock and molten metal into a vibrant land and seascape for the colorful family of creatures about to appear in every size, shape, and manner of complexity. Life emerged wherever water could be found.

In ancient seas water sculpted living bodies, inside and out; designed life's dwellings, and the way life organized its days. From the simplest amoeba to the hearts and wombs and senses of complex mammals, water is irreplaceable. Humans breathe with water; we see and hear and taste with water; we think and move and dream with water; we conceive in water, and as the children of the future are born from water with water we bless their coming.

Human culture sprang up in river basins, along ocean coasts. Today we are mindful of the grim reality that we, humans, may destroy ourselves and life as we know it in wars over water.

We are still making decisions personally and at the international level ignoring two fundamental facts. First – water is above all a sacred, dynamic presence in the Universe; life is a continuation of its force and flow. Second – water is more than a human right; it is life or death for all creatures and their future generations.

While we continue to spend billions of dollars to discover water on other planets, let us rediscover the miracle of water on Earth.

The Lure of Water

From space, the earth appears as it truly is, that spinning, dancing blue planet. No other element is as versatile as is water showing three faces, three moments in time transformed by temperature to liquid, vapor or solid. Fully three-quarters of the planet is awash in water with land

scattered throughout the seas. No boundaries divide this round globe when seen from above, and the forces of attraction maintain the integrity.

For many years we thought that the sun alone was essential to life. Our sense of wonder and awe is activated as we come to understand that

plants eat the sun and use that energy to create other plants. This feast of life, this unbroken chain of being provides a new model for Eucharist. We gain new insight as we see that life is a single unity nourished by a common source.

Water Facts

Under the oceans are mountains higher than Mount Everest, canyons deeper than the Grand Canyon, and the largest living structure on Earth—Australia's Great Barrier Reef.

Regions of the world that are pumping out ground water faster than aquifers can be recharged include the western United States, northern China, northern and western India, north Africa and west Asia.

Agriculture accounts for over 80% of world water consumption.

All that promotes this understanding allows us to live more deeply in communion with all of creation.

Recently, we learned that "plants eating the sun" is not the only way to create food. Extravagant explosions of life were discovered only twenty-five years ago in the deep sea. Hot vents, thermal vents, that spew water at temperatures as high as 350 degrees C nourish an elaborate array of fast-growing creatures that thrive on bacteria; they make food using chemical energy.

We know that life originated in the sea, hundreds of millions of years ago. Some courageous early cells struggled, probably for generations to establish a foothold on land. Those first creatures sacrificed themselves for the grand procession of life that would come after them. In a real sense, we, too, are of the sea; our bodies mimic the ocean. The percentage of salt in the ocean is identical to the percentage of salt that runs through our veins. Before our birth we floated in water, protected by a sack that surrounded and nourished us. Today we are land bound, trying to recover those deep memories of a history just past our ability to glimpse.

Our transition to land is so complete that we have no easy way of returning to the sea. We know more about the surface of the moon that we know about the depths of the sea. Humans have walked the moon; no human has taken a step in

the deepest part of the sea. Yet we feel that lure, that attraction to the sea that continues to draw us. We go to the water's edge to take a measure of ourselves, to find the faithfulness and courage that is required to face the challenges of our times. We know that water is alive, that it is sacred. We have experienced its healing powers. We find ourselves refreshed, renewed at deep levels each time we return from the sea. We come to the edge of the sea because we know instinctively that what Rachel Carson says is true, that "...it is a world that keeps alive the sense of continuing creation and the relentless drive of life."

Water is a pervasive presence in our lives. We drink it, we bathe in it and we play in water. Yet the sense of mystery and awe that it inspires is never far from us. We welcome and bless new members of our faith into the Christian community through the waters of Baptism. We frequently use water in rituals, recognizing its life-giving properties. Without this most abundant element in the universe, there would be no food, no fish, no plants, no life. When we speak of streams of living water, we acknowledge there is

Water Facts

The minimum amount of water that the average person needs daily for drinking, cooking, bathing and sanitation is 13 gallons. The average person in the U.S. uses between 65 and 78 gallons of water daily.

Nearly 40% of the world's population lives alongside international rivers. Two billion people depend on international cooperation to ensure their water supply.

One billion people worldwide do not have any water within a 15-minute walk of their homes.

no life apart from water. This is not a metaphorical use of language; it honors the sacredness of life because it shapes and sustains life.

Water's deepest desire is to run freely to the sea. Every day that desire is thwarted because of human intervention. The sea has become the repository of things we no longer want and substances that are toxic to life. Our way of living has fouled the water around the world, and we have placed at risk that endless procession of life that needs clean water to survive. We have wasted the precious fresh water that slakes the thirst of all

living creatures, and we are told that in this new century, most wars will be fought to control access to water. If life is to continue, then we need to remember ourselves as people of the sea who respect water's desire and treat it with the reverence it deserves.

In reclaiming our primordial connection to the sea, we manifest our commitment to live out of our deepest desire. This desire can be diverted and subverted, but, put simply, we desire to live in

right relationship with the earth community, with the other members of our planetary family, both human and other-than-human. By learning again our place in the order of things, by acknowledging that this blue-green planet is the primary revelation of the Divine, we affirm our oneness with the sacred waters of the world and the intricate web of life it supports. We commit ourselves to this place, our only home, and to the task of protecting water always and everywhere, favoring life in all its unfolding possibilities.

Water Facts

Earth was once completely covered by water.

There is no more water on Earth now than there was 2,000 years ago. The world population sharing the planet's finite freshwater supply then was about two-hundred million. More than six billion people depend on that same finite water supply today.

Between 1900 and 2000, global water consumption rose sevenfold, more than double the rate of the population growth.

The World's Water Crisis and Its Effect on Women and Children

"The world's water crisis is having a devastating impact on the quality of life for billions of the world's citizens caught between twin realities of water scarcity and water pollution. In fact, the world's intensifying water crisis is literally the arbiter of life and death for a growing number of people. Here in the United States, says the Natural Resources Defense Council, some 53 million Americans — nearly one-fifth of the population— drink tap water contaminated with lead, fecal bacterial, or other serious pollutants. However, it is also very clear that the world's poor are taking the brunt of the crisis."¹

Women are the most affected by this crisis. More than half the 1.2 billion people who do not have access to water are women and girls. Women's traditional role as water collectors has confined them to perpetual poverty. Further research on this topic yielded an abundance of information. Reflected below are but four of the very serious realities which impact the lives of women and children from Third World countries:

Women and girls are responsible for collecting water for cooking, cleaning, health and

hygiene, and if they have access to land, growing food. In rural areas, women walk long distances to fetch water, often spending four to five hours per day carrying heavy containers and suffering acute physical problems. In arid and drought-prone areas that challenge is compounded. In urban areas, women and girls can spend hours waiting in line to collect intermittent water supplies at standpipes. The inordinate burden of fetching water inhibits the involvement of both women and girls in other activities, such as education, income generation, cultural and political life, and rest and recreation.²

The World Health Organization estimates that 80 percent of all sickness in the world is attributable to unsafe water and sanitation. Waterborne diseases kill 3.4 million people, mostly children, annually. Millions more are sickened with diseases that are preventable by access to clean water and health care information. Women bear the main burden of caring for those who are ill. Medical costs associated with family illness increase household debt and deepen poverty.³

Water Facts

Freshwater animals are disappearing five times faster than land animals.

Of the remaining 126 species of marine animals, 88 are on the list of threatened species.

Women's entitlement to water is often precarious at best. Women make multiple and maximum use of water sources and attempt to

Water Facts

Contaminated water and waterborne diseases constitute more than half of all hospital admissions at any one time.

Newborn humans are 97% water. Adults are about 75% water. The human brain is 75% water.

A mere 2% drop in body water can trigger fuzzy, short term memory, trouble with basic math, and difficulty focusing on a computer screen.

ensure that these sources do not become polluted. Given their many and often competing needs, such as assigning water for livestock and for human consumption, as well as time and resource constraints, women often cannot avoid contaminating water supplies. As water sources become contaminated from humans, animals or agricultural runoff, or as drought increases or water sources deteriorate due to watershed mismanagement, women and children must walk longer distances to secure water.⁴

Because women are most often the collectors, uses and managers of water in the household they have considerable knowledge about water resources. Conversely, men in rural areas almost never fetch water. Their involvement with water is related to agriculture or livestock. Because men's work is considered a part of the productive economy of paid labor, it is generally seen as more worthy of infrastructure investments. As a result there may be infrastructure for irrigation, but not safe drinking water within cartage distance for other activities considered part of the care economy. This limits women's engagement in a range of economic activities that depend on access to safe water. The absence of women in decision-making positions results in the creation of policies that fail to address women's needs and concerns.⁵

Unless we dramatically change our ways, between one-half and two-thirds of humanity will be living with severe fresh water shortages within the next quarter century. When one considers this reality and the above described realities impacting women's lives, one could become traumatized! What can we in developed countries do to help our

sisters in the undeveloped parts of our world? We are people who come from an ethic of the common good and an ethic of solidarity with those in pain and in need of care. Pope John Paul II stated in his message at the World Day of Peace in January, 1990, that "the poor, to whom the earth is entrusted no less than to others, must be enabled to find a way out of their poverty." Further in the same document he notes, "Modern society will find no solution to the ecological problem unless it takes a serious look at its lifestyle. In many parts of the world, society is given to instant gratification and consumerism while remaining indifferent to the damage which these cause."

What can we do? Here are a few suggestions:

- Oppose the privatization of water and become informed about its ramifications.
- Think of some ways you can conserve water in your home.
- Find out how water is managed in your region or town.
- Limit the use of lawn fertilizers, and be sure to use only phosphorus-free fertilizers.
- Become an educated consumer. Buy recycled, environmentally friendly products.
- Actively support national water protection measures, e.g. Clean Water Act, Clean Ocean Act.
- Develop a new global consensus about water. As the *Treaty Initiative to Share and Protect the Global Water Supply* asserts:
 - We must affirm that water's intrinsic value precedes its utilitarian and commercial value
 - We must acknowledge that freshwater belongs to the entire earth and all its species. It is not the property of humans alone, nor a commodity to be manipulated for profit.
 - We must assert that access to clean freshwater is not only a human need, but a fundamental human right.
 - We must declare the global freshwater supply a common good—a shared legacy and a public trust, the collective responsibility of us all.⁶

Notes

- 1 Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke *Blue Gold—the Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (New York: New Press, 2002).
- 2 WEDO, Sustainable Development “Gender Differences in Water Use and Management.”
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 “Women and Water Resources,” FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization, United Nations.
- 5 WEDO, “Gender Differences in Water Use and Management.”
- 6 See *Perspectives*, Publication of the Holy Cross International Justice Office (Winter, 2003)

Water Above and Below: Surface and Ground Water

Freshwater is the single most precious element for all life on Earth. Although 70 percent of the world's surface is covered by water, only a fraction of that – 2.5 percent – is fresh water, of which 70 percent is frozen in ice caps. Less than one percent is actually available for human use.

Water Facts

Two-thirds of the water used in an average U.S. home is used in the bathroom, much of it consumed by the toilet, which requires four to six gallons per flush.

One-third of U.S. rivers, one-half of U.S. estuaries, and more than one-half of U.S. lakes are not fit for fishing or swimming—never mind drinking!

Ground water is water that accumulates underground. An amount of snow and rainwater seeps into the ground to become ground water. Ground water moves into water-filled layers of porous geologic formations called aquifers. Ninety percent of Earth's freshwater (excluding what is locked in ice caps) is ground water. Since ground water isn't seen, it can be and is often dangerously exploited without public awareness. Threats to ground water are over-extraction, pollution and diversion.

The amount of water pumped out of an aquifer should be less than what nature supplies to recharge the aquifer. Increasingly water in aquifers is being pumped out of the ground faster than it can be replenished. For example, the Ogallala aquifer, underlying 74,000 square miles of eight western states, provides one-fifth of the irrigation of the United States' farmland. Water is being pumped out of this aquifer 8 to 14 times faster (depending on the time of year) than it is being recharged. The aquifer is falling one foot per year.

Ground water is also becoming polluted. As pollutants on the land seep into the ground the water is contaminated. Such pollutants include fertilizers, pesticides, run off from roads, and industrial contaminants.

Diversion of water, that is, changing where water flows, also affects ground water. Changing the contour of the land and adding impervious surfaces such as roads, parking lots and rooftops influences the water flow and can reduce the amount of water that would ordinarily replenish aquifers. For example, in developed areas, rain and snow is less apt to soak into the ground, but rather will flow over impervious areas directly into streams and rivers.

Surface water is water that accumulates on the surface of the Earth when rainfall exceeds the infiltration capacity of the soil. Surface water also

Water Facts

Gallons of water need to produce:

- One pound of potatoes—100 gallons
- One pound of rice—340 gallons
- One pound of chicken—460 gallons
- One pound of beef—4,200 gallons
- One 6 inch silicon wafer (computer)—1,892 gallons
- One average U.S. automobile—39,000 gallons
- One gallon of gasoline—approximately 9 gallons of water

flows into bodies of water such as streams, rivers, lakes and reservoirs rather than seeping into the ground. To some extent, the quality of 30,000 miles of rivers and the 2,200 square miles of lakes in the United States has improved in recent years. However, problems still remain. One-third of the

rivers and one-half of the lakes in the US are too polluted for fishing or swimming. Across the country, rivers increasingly run severely parched or dry, such as the Colorado River that is so diverted that by the time it reaches the Sea of Cortez, it is down to a trickle.

Dams interfere with the natural flow of rivers, damage and destroy river habitats, and make it impossible for ocean fish to reach inland breeding grounds. About 76,000 dams have been built in

the U.S. to provide power, drinking water and irrigation.

Like ground water, surface water is too often contaminated by a variety of pollutants and diverted in ways that are harmful to the water bodies themselves, and to the ecosystems that are dependent on them. Increased awareness and action on the part of citizens and improved water management can contribute to the quality of water "above and below."



Discussion Questions

(Barling) Access to water is an occasion for conflict. In your state or region of the country, do you have any experience of people coming into conflict over access to water? What has been the resolution of these conflicts? Are you satisfied with the outcome?

(Bilderback and ROW) What facts about water motivate you the most strongly to cut back over-use or carelessness about water? What "water memories" do you have that are humorous, fearful, meaningful or calming for you?

(Connolly) Connolly uses the phrase "the primordial beat of God's action in their lives" to describe the trust that tribal people have that rain will come, and their entrustment to the laws of nature. How do westerners with abundant water and flagrant use of it become sensitive to the "primordial beat of God's action" in lives that are not so vulnerable to the lack of natural resources?

(Gudorf) "Justice for the poor in the struggle to save the biosphere will rest on how successful we are in preventing the bulk of the sacrifices from falling on those with the least power to redress the situation, and success in this task will depend on the participation of the poor in the struggle. Increasingly religions are being pushed to shift from preaching charity toward the poor toward teaching justice for the poor. This shift not only requires that the poor themselves be brought into the advocacy activity, but also that they progressively accept other burdens of responsible adulthood as they can. One of those is paying for water."

Do you agree or disagree with Gudorf's argument that paying for water makes people take responsibility for its use? What is justice for the poor in the matter of access to water? Is paying for water a principle that can be equitably applied to persons in developing countries?

(Kozel) "Ponder how you depend upon water daily, from the moment you arise until you fall asleep at night."

What is your greatest dependence? After satisfying thirst, what do you personally use the most water for? How would the quality of your life be different if you didn't have the access to water you presently have?

(Cont'd on page 16)

Bottled Water Facts

Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Northeast Community

Each day over 70 million bottles of water are sold in the US.

Last year over 38 billion single-use water bottles ended up in U.S. landfills and waterways leaching toxins into our earth and water.

Bottled Water production, transportation and disposal required more than 17 million barrels of oil last year in America alone – enough fuel for more than 1 million cars for a year, generating more than 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide.

1.5 million barrels of oil are used to produce the plastic bottles for the 8 billion gallons of bottled water consumed each year in the U.S. This equates to enough oil to power 100,000 vehicles for a year.

Transporting water bottles from origin to market in the U.S. alone is equivalent to 38,000, eighteen-wheel trucks delivering water weekly.

Over 2.5 billion tons of plastic are used each year to produce single-use water bottles – resulting in over 1.5 million tons of plastic waste per year – requiring 47 million gallons of oil to produce.

Bottled water companies, water to production ratios are roughly 3 to 1. This means for every 3 liters of freshwater that the bottled water industry takes from the earth and our U.S. municipal water sources only 1 liter of bottled water is actually produced. What happens to the remaining 2 liters? It is used to clean bottles and machinery and discarded as wastewater.

Corporate Stand on Water

We the Sisters of Mercy -Northeast Community, Associates and Companions believe:

- Water is a human right and a public trust.
- All people have the right to high quality potable water.
- Water is a sacred gift not to be commoditized.
- Plastic water bottles are a hazard to human health and the health of Earth.
- Fresh water is a shared legacy and a collective responsibility.

Therefore, we support actions and policies that:

- Ensure universal access to sufficient, affordable, safe water for all people especially the most vulnerable.
- Protect fresh water as a sustainable, renewal resource.
- Implement the objectives of the UN Millennium Goals on water.

We oppose actions and policies that:

- Endanger the world's supply of water, aquifers, lakes, rivers and oceans.
- Deprive humans and other species access to adequate, safe water essential for life.
- Favor the privatization of water as a commodity to be bought and sold for profit when in reality it is a heritage we all hold in common.
- Encourage the use and sale of bottled water except in circumstances when potable water is not available.

Living in Harmony: Give Drink to the Thirsty¹

Constance M. Kozel, R.S.M.

*If there is magic on this planet,
it is contained in water.*

--Loren Eisley

Earth has been practicing this work of Mercy, of giving drink to the thirsty, ever since the oceans were formed 4.43 million years ago! And the waters of earth are a gift from the stars. Without water nothing would live.²

Ponder how you depend upon water daily, from the moment you arise until you fall asleep at night: washing, drinking, cooking, cleaning, watering plants, even eating, for foods themselves have a high content of water. And so have we all, for that matter.

Remember too how the beauty of water has nourished your spirit—the rushing waters of a stream or waterfall, the vast blue ocean; the joy of summer rain after a hot spell; the sparkle of the first snow; and early morning dew glistening on a spider web. It is drink for the thirsty soul indeed.

But this very pure life-giving being is in grave danger and all life forms with it. One example: we are discovering that fluoride in water, long promoted as a benevolent fighter of tooth decay, may contribute to cancer, and to bone, kidney and neurological diseases. The toxic substances we use for cleaning our houses and work sites end up in rivers, streams and aquifers, endangering plant and fish life.

Some good news is that the bishops of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and British Columbia are writing a pastoral letter regarding the importance of the Columbia River—its physical features and its value as spiritual inspiration. They are concerned because many

Native American tribes can no longer fish in the river.³

As we give thanks for the gift of water, let us join earth in her work of Mercy by resolving to do our part to keep earth's water flowing and clean. As Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote:

What would the world be, once bereft
Of wet and wildness? Let them be left,
O let them be left, wildness and wet;
Long live the weeds and the wilderness yet.⁴



NOTES

1. This reflection was originally published in *Inform*, the newsletter of the Sisters of Mercy, Dallas (PA) Regional Community, November, 1996.
2. See the 27-minute documentary film "Water, Sacred and Profaned," available from Foundation for Global Community, 222 High Street, Palo Alto, CA 94301. (800) 707-7932. It can be purchased for \$24.00, which includes tax, shipping and handling.
3. Editor's Note: The document was eventually published in 2000. It is titled: *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good, An International Pastoral Letter by the Catholic Bishops of the Watershed Region*. The text is available in English, Spanish and French from the Washington State Catholic Conference, wsccl@thewsccl.org.
4. Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Inversnaid"

Errata: We apologize that the author of the article "Two Courageous Foremothers as Role Models in the Gospel of John" was incorrectly identified on the cover of Volume 19 No. 1. The author, as identified correctly with the article, is **Judith Schubert, R.S.M.**

Water: A Call to Conversion

M. Gratia L'Esperance, R.S.M.

Let us plunge into the depths of meaning and experience that surround us in our contemplation of the gift of water.

Reflection

Life itself began in the waters of the earth – the only planet in our solar system covered with so much water. We ourselves were nurtured in the waters of the womb. At our second birth in the waters of new life in Christ, we took the plunge (which is the meaning of the Greek word *baptism*) into a new community, a new commitment, and a new way of living.

We have learned from ritual, song, and the story of salvation how God created a watered garden; used the ark to save people from the great flood; brought the Hebrew people out of slavery through the waters of the Reed Sea; gave the prophet Ezechiel a vision of immense waters flowing from the right side of the temple, transforming all in its path; called Jesus from his baptism in the Jordan to pour out his life for us; and after the resurrection allowed his disciples to see him at the waters of the Sea of Galilee.

As Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and Associates, we strive to follow Jesus through the legacy of Catherine McAuley, borne by Frances Warde and her companions in their perilous journey across the Atlantic. Today, we “share responsibility for the mission of the Sisters of Mercy and the personal and communal conversion that is needed as we envision new ways of living Mercy in our world.”¹

How profound is the significance of our venture of reshaping our twenty-five communities into six! And for us locally, joining into one Community of Great Waters: where sisters in Erie,

Buffalo and Rochester live near two of the Great Lakes, Erie and Ontario; in Pittsburgh with its Three Rivers where the Allegheny and the Monongahela join to form the Ohio; and in the Philippine Islands which rise out of the Pacific Ocean, largest of all waters! The providence of God has brought each of us to this time and place, where we “live and move and have our being” (Acts, 17:28), near these great waters and (for those of us in the United States) near the most abundant sources of fresh water in the world.

It is so easy to take such a precious gift for granted. While millions of people in the Philippines, Asia, and Africa have only polluted sources of water, and their women and children bear the burden of walking miles to carry home their daily supply, we in North America have been spared so far. Through wise public policy since the late 19th century, we are blessed with potable water. We routinely and prodigally use this drinking-quality water for all other purposes. It is available at a turn of a tap that even dispenses it heated at our wish!

The United Nations warned in 2009 that climate change harbors the potential for serious conflicts over water. Some authors dispute this, saying that countries do suffer from internal conflicts, but that even the Palestinians and Israelis have a commission to address water concerns.²

Pollution defiles our waters with toxic waste. Downpours of rain erode and rob our fields of soil. Poverty forces people to denude their lands of water-retaining vegetation. Deserts are expanding. The phenomenon of soaring bottled-water sales encourages such corporations as Coca Cola, Pepsi, and Nestlé to use their high profits to take over public water systems, especially in poorer countries. Corporations are pressuring national governments to privatize their systems of

Life itself began in the waters of the earth – the only planet in our solar system covered with so much water. We ourselves were nurtured in the waters of the womb. At our second birth in the waters of new life in Christ, we took the plunge (which is the meaning of the Greek word baptism) into a new community, a new commitment, and a new way of living.

providing water, with consequent high costs to their populations.³

The call to heal the earth and preserve its fragile ecology is an urgent summons to conversion, especially for us in the United States. Achieving this ideal depends on each of us doing our part in various practical ways described below. Of course, each one must take responsibility for judging what is possible in view of health and other personal and communal needs. We cannot do everything, but we can do something!

As sisters with a vow of poverty or as associates with a baptismal call to live simply, we can take warning from Jesus' parable of how the rich man ignored Lazarus begging at his gate:

He called out, "Father Abraham, have pity on me. Send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue, for I am in torment in these flames."

"My child," replied Abraham, "remember that you were well-off in your lifetime, while Lazarus was in misery."

Now he has found consolation here, but you have found torment."

(Luke 16:24-25)

One Specific Concern: Bottled Water

Here is a specific problem that we can begin immediately to address. Is bottled water that much better than what comes out of your tap? The answer depends. You can easily test your tap water by checking your community water report or sending your water to a local lab. Plastic bottles pose a different set of problems, including endocrine disrupters that could cause cancer.

A recommendation is to avoid purchase of bottled water; rather, clean and refill your own container.

Practical Suggestions:

- Run dishwashers and washing machines only when full (without overloading).
- Install water-efficient toilets, shower heads, and faucet aerators.

Bottled Versus Tap Water: Pros and Cons

Bottled Water

Pros	Cons
Low-sodium, low nitrate, added minerals	Not regulated or monitored for purity by public health authorities; few guarantees that the contents are from other than public tap water supplies
May taste better	When tested for contaminants and taste, was rated as good as but not better than many municipal water supplies
Convenient as a short-term alternate supply (e.g., in Haiti following the earthquake disaster)	Bulky to carry or store in multiple packs
	Expensive: costs more per gallon than gasoline
	This product's rapid growth increases our dependence on oil to manufacture and transport plastic containers
	Most plastic containers are not bio-degradable or recyclable, so that large quantities end up in landfills, where they last for hundreds of years

Tap Water

Regularly monitored and tested by public health authorities	Can have an "off" taste or odor; use of a filter can help this problem
Easier on the environment	Can be exposed to toxic substances that can combine and interact
Convenient supply in most buildings and parks	Not recommended for people with compromised immune systems. Example: high sodium levels, determined safe for most people, can be dangerous for people with high blood pressure, older people, or women who are pregnant
Less expensive than bottled	

- Substitute short showers for baths; turn off water while soaping.
- Turn off water when brushing teeth/
- In washing dishes by hand, use a second pan for rinsing.
- Collect rainwater or grey water for gardening use.
- Reduce or avoid use of toxic materials, such as fertilizers, pesticides, or cleaning products which can pollute groundwater or run off into lakes and streams.
- Substitute white vinegar and baking soda as examples of effective cleansers.
- Support efforts to safeguard watershed areas, such as the Sisters' reforestation project in the Philippines.
- Spend time seeing, hearing, and rejoicing in the beauty of the earth and its waters. Share with others your love of the earth.
- Pray, visualize, hope, meditate, dream, and think big when doing small things. Think about the kind of earth you hope to leave the next generations. Since each of us bears responsibility for the communities and policies that we are a part of, think about redesigning cities, restructuring the economy, re-conceiving humanity's role on the earth.⁴

General Concerns:

- Stay informed about the state of the earth, its waters, and global climate change. Start a study group.
- Contact your local, state and federal legislators about matters of public policy.
- Support efforts to preserve and increase wetlands which serve as indispensable filters for groundwater as well as habitat for wildlife (lost coastal wetlands could have lessened the impact of Hurricane Katrina).
- Encourage local sewage plants to compost their sludge instead of disposing of it in lakes or rivers.

NOTES

1. Preamble, Governance Plan of New York, Pennsylvania, Pacific West Community, 2007.
2. See Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit* (2002) and Wendy Barnaby, "Do Nations Go to War over Water?" *Nature* (2009).
3. See Maude Barlow and Tony Clarke, *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (New York: The New Press, 2002).
4. Adapted from "101 Ways to Heal the Earth," *In Context*, P.O. Box 11470, Rainbridge Island, WA 98110.



(Cont'd from page 11)

Discussion Questions

(Northeast) In any of your institutions, has there been a cut-back on the purchase and use of bottled water? Wasn't there a time when people drank tap water? What happened to make us feel that tap water wasn't acceptable?

(Rosenblatt) "The woman responds, as a woman of faith, with an expression of her deepest spiritual hopes. 'I know that Messiah is coming...When he comes he will proclaim all these things to us.' (4:25). She is seeking a resolution to all these theological problems..."

As part of your messianic expectation, for what problems are you seeking resolution through the causes you have adopted as your own justice projects?

(Yates) "A walk in the woods or along a lake shore is more than a breath of fresh air. It is what corrects imbalance, misdirection, confusion and scatteredness. Centeredness is restored. God's world has been righted...."

How do you describe the effect that being in nature has on you? What natural setting makes you feel most refreshed?

Ethical Issues and Water Privatization

Christine Gudorf, Ph.D.

Private provision of some city utilities/services has existed in the developed world throughout the modern period. In recent decades this has expanded to include private companies managing prisons, schools, military support, national security systems, toll highways and even, according to a bill recently introduced in the Arizona legislature, the state capitol building. A parallel expansion of privatization has also taken place in the developing world, and has been pressed on poor nations by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund since the 1970s as a precondition of both aid and debt relief. Privatization in poor developing nations was often greeted with eager acceptance by state authorities but opposition from NGOs, unions and popular organizations. Under privatization regimes, Latin American nations, for example, have had to sell or take on majority partners in their telephone companies, airlines, railroads, electric plants and water plants.

In the last decade and a half, water privatization in particular has spread from developed nations to many developing nations. Originally experienced in Latin American countries, it now includes countries in the Middle East, and North Africa as well as nations formed from the former Soviet Union. A handful of global companies that hold the majority of municipal water contracts began in western European cities over a hundred years ago, including Suez Lyonnaise des Aux and Aguas de Barcelona. These have been joined by other global companies, including the French company, Vivendi, and Azurix, an affiliate of the US giant Bechtel.

Infrastructure costs influenced the World Bank and the IMF, beginning in the 1970s, to promote privatization. Populations in developing nations were exploding under the unfinished demographic transition, and rural to urban migration was quickly expanding the size of cities. Developing nations did not have the necessary capital for the infrastructure expansion necessary

to extend services to these new urban areas. Privatization was viewed by many as a matter of private companies supplying the capital that cities and nations needed to expand infrastructure in order to provide water and sewer service to the new urban areas. In the case of water privatization, companies like Vivendi, Suez Lyonnaise des Aux and its affiliates, Odebrecht, Aguas de Barcelona, and Aguas del Illimani had managed profitable and efficient municipal water systems in France, Spain and other European nations for well over a century – why not in Bolivia, Argentina, and Brazil?

Application to South America

Not surprisingly, the difference was the mass of the poor that substituted in Latin America for the middle class majorities of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Europe. Developing nations have typically had large poor majorities, and very small middle and upper classes. While the companies understood that the immediate demand was to expand service to the numerous unserved areas, they were unwilling to accept all of the cost of building the infrastructure, so they attempted to raise rates in order to garner much of the capital for expansion. In some places, such as Cochabamba and El Alto, Bolivia, rate raises of 125% in the first five years led to riots and the cancellation of contracts. In 2004 the Water Defense Commission of Uruguay through popular plebiscite led a successful campaign to eject Aguas de Barcelona, and prevent further water privatization. In 2005 Aguas de Barcelona was forced out of Colombia for violating its contract by raising rates by 55 to 125% in the course of ten years.¹

Water resale was a significant factor in these riots. While the companies had raised the municipal water rates by as much as 125% over a period of 5-10 years, many of the poor did not have direct access to water from these companies. Instead, they bought their water from middlemen who trucked municipal water in barrels from their

own businesses or homes and sold it at many times the original cost in poor, outlier neighborhoods that were not connected to the municipal system. So a rate rise of 125% to a customer of the municipal water company might mean that a family buying water off a truck from a municipal water customer at ten times the municipal customer cost might be paying a new rate of twenty times the earlier municipal rate.

In Bahia Blanco and Santa Fe, Argentina, contracts with private companies were also cancelled. Complaints not only concerned much higher rates for water, but also disease outbreaks resulting from increased levels of fecal matter in the water, due to retention of outdated plants with insufficient capacity to treat the increased volumes of water. In places where cities and regions did not cancel contracts, some of the private companies themselves cancelled contracts, refusing to invest large sums that could only be recouped over a very long period. In a global capital system in which stockholders demand immediate and high return on capital, privatization of water can only work when the customer population can afford to take on at least a significant share of the capital costs of massive infrastructure expansion.

Problems in Provision of Water to the Poor

In developing nations as a whole, three major problems in providing water to poor communities are unfortunately very common. The first problem in urban areas is that there has been little or no funding to extend municipal water to the outer rings of cities that have continued to expand in the last four to six decades. These communities, many of which originated as squatter communities, often wait two decades to obtain city water. In its absence, they must buy water by the liter or gallon at prices that are ten to one hundred times the price of city water.²

The second problem concerns the lack of funding for sanitary sewers in these expanding urban areas, and other areas as well. When combined with untreated animal waste and chemical or industrial runoff, this causes contamination of surface water, and often of ground water as well.

A third related problem is the age and ineffectiveness of the water treatment plants in many cities around the world. In numerous African cities, for example, many water treatment plants were built before independence in the 1960s. This is one reason why sale of bottled water has exploded in much of the developing world, sometimes exceeding levels in the developed world. The upper and middle classes often rely on bottled water to secure safe drinking water.

Notice that all these problems, which figure extensively in the literature, concern urban water. Yet the situation in many rural areas of the developing world is at least as bad. Water is sometimes far distant, and increasingly polluted. Rivers deliver urban pollution to rural dwellers, and that pollution is compounded by their own and their animals' wastes. Many areas of the world historically dependent upon well water, including China, Africa and the Americas, have seen wells go dry. Water tables have dropped, often due to non-sustainable irrigation, or export of water to nearby urban areas without retaining sufficient local reserves.

Access to Water

There is no more basic human need than water. Examples of compassion and hospitality in sacred texts often center upon the offer of water to the thirsty. Absolute human dependence upon water is the foundation of the common understanding of water as a basic human right. For this reason, some legal systems have incorporated aspects of community access to water. For example, in many legal systems rivers cannot be owned as property, and lakes can only be owned if a single owner controls all the shoreline.

In many arid and semi-arid nations, there are legal provisions investing all members of settlements, as well as travelers, with rights to the communal well. These provisions to assure that all have secure access to water include banning fees that would restrict the access of the poor, and limiting how much water any single member can draw when water levels are low.

Still, one form of water privatization is that currently proposed in Turkey. Not only treatment plants, delivery systems, and monopoly status are

being sold to private companies, but also all of the regional water sources, including rivers, lakes, wells and groundwater. There are numerous philosophical and religious objections to such a plan.

Many advocates of the poor around the world, both historically and in the contemporary period, have understood access to water to be like the political rights of free speech, assembly and equal representation and a right to education. They see it as something that should be free, a human right, and guaranteed by government.

Latinamerica Press commends the Catholic Church in Brazil for its social justice activity in establishing the Pastoral Land Commission, which has pushed for a guarantee of high-quality water for all Brazilians since 1999. *Latinamerica Press* cites the final document of the first Pastoral Land Commission Congress:

Such a stance is easily understood as requiring civil authorities to guarantee this right. But the ecological situation in which our world exists demands that the poor, too, have responsibility for conservation of water, and that access to water should be understood more like access to food.

No society can simply expand access to water to everyone and expect that all will be well. Among experts, a common slogan is that "water management is conflict management," because potable water is in very short supply. Societies can expand political rights without ever running out. No one's right to free speech is necessarily limited by another's right to free speech. But the amount of water (especially potable water) in any place on our earth is finite. Because it is necessary to life forms, potable water must be conserved as potable, so that it can be endlessly recycled to nourish life.

Allotment of Water

Water conservation and just access of the poor to water sometimes exist in tension. By itself, just access of the poor to water, for example, could mean a system of allotments where each household was allotted an amount based on the number of inhabitants. Wartime allotments of scarce foodstuffs often follow this model. But let us examine this distribution model within the water cycle.

Naturally, water evaporates, forms clouds, falls as rain/ snow/ sleet, then forms lakes and creeks which feed rivers, which flow into oceans, and the cycle begins again. But water is not automatically recycled within the human chain of use. Water used by humans today becomes mixed with human wastes, chemicals, oils and other contaminants. Huge amounts of both fresh and ocean water have been contaminated. In each cycle of human use, more water is lost to contamination, and ordinary reclamation recovers only a portion of that which is lost.

Allotting water according to household numbers – however just a distribution schema might otherwise be – would not conserve water. Rather the tendency would be for each household to use its allotment. Conservation of water involves critical attention to one's water use in order to ensure the most efficient use of water and the least amount of waste. That is, humans must invest time and effort, and sometimes funds, into establishing more conservative water usage. Thus, conservation involves "costs," both monetary and non-monetary. Normally humans will only "pay" these costs if there is something to be gained in return. For some small part of the population – e.g., vegans, those who cycle to work, or Floridians who forswear air conditioning – the ecological gain alone may be enough to offset the sacrifice. But the vast majority of humans expect some kind of personal payback for expending these costs. We want lower water, gas and electric bills, among other things, in return for our conservation efforts. As Thomas Aquinas noted, no one takes care of resources which belong to everyone:

Man has a twofold competence with regard to material things. The first is to care for and distribute the earth's resources. Understood in this way, it is not merely legitimate for a man to possess things as his own, it is even necessary for human life, and this for three reasons. First, because each man takes more trouble to care for something that is his sole responsibility than what is held in common or by many, for in such a case each individual shirks the work and leaves the responsibility to someone else, which is what happens when too many officials are involved. Second, because human affairs are more efficiently organized if each person has his own responsibility to discharge; there would be chaos

if everybody cared for everything. Third, because men live together in greater peace where everyone is content with his task. We do, in fact, notice that quarrels often break out between men who hold things in common without qualification.

Man's other great competence is to use and manage the world's resources. Now in regard to this, no man is entitled to manage things entirely for himself, he must do so in the interests of all, so that he is ready to share with others in case of necessity.³

Such an understanding of human nature must influence how we see the rights of the poor to water. Water should not be free of all costs, even for the poor. If it is completely free, it will be subject to waste, for the poor are no more virtuous than other humans. They require incentives in return for effort.

So the difficulty facing us is that we have billions of poor persons who need water every day, and for whom it would be irresponsible to provide water freely and unrestrictedly, since there is no incentive to conserve what is freely provided. Those who would point to the past as ideal, when the majority of humans took water from streams and wells without charge, must recognize that human density – population pressures – have created a new world in which such customs are as outdated as keeping cows and pigs in one's urban apartment. Human density has made it necessary to create sewer systems to keep water and wastes separate, water treatment plants to treat water to make it drinkable, and water delivery systems to take water to where people need it. While water could be understood as free in the past, treated water that is delivered to humans free of contamination cannot be made completely free – it must be limited in some way if water resources are to be sustainable. Limitations on use can be accomplished by setting a monetary value on water as occurs in capitalist systems, or by including water among a list of resources from which individuals or groups choose how to "spend" allotted credits. Some might choose to use less water and more electricity, others less of both but more transportation credits. Many of us are most accustomed to limiting access based on price, though it is clear that as with other rights such as food, shelter, medical care and basic education,

water cannot be denied to those without funds, as can luxury goods.

Use and Waste of Water

Ideally, in the future we will create closed loops for water – we will capture from rainfall, treat and re-use **all** the water that evaporates in our lawns and fields as well as all of our human waste streams. But for the vast majority of the world, that is a long way off. Even in the United States and Western Europe, our water systems are sadly outdated. Most do not have the capacity to test for many kinds of contaminants, especially chemical ones, much less treat for them. Remedying the leakage issue – which could allow the United States to save 30-40% of our treated water – would cost many billions of dollars. The case is similar in Great Britain, where a parliamentary study, upon finding that in Wales and Southeast England the leakage rate is 23%, observed:

Companies have little financial incentive ... [to remedy] their own economic levels of leakage. The benefits that companies see from reducing their leakage are often very small, largely savings in power and chemicals only. They do not receive any immediate benefits from deferring the construction of a new reservoir, etc. and thus in effect there is a market failure."⁴

If water companies do not pay for the water they take from rivers, lakes and underground water tables, they obtain it for their cost of removal alone. They have no incentive to conserve, as long as new sources exist. Despite local shortages from place to place, because water companies do not pay for the water itself, they find it cheaper to draw on new sources than to plug the leaks in their delivery systems.

In more or less the same way, individuals receiving municipal water do not conserve, because the cost of waste is so low, compared to the inconvenience of forgoing home swimming pools, green golf courses or automated home sprinkler systems. For many people, the cost of water is so low that there is little or no incentive to pay to replace wasteful above ground sprinkler systems with underground drip systems, ten gallon toilets with 2.5 gallon ones, or old shower heads with ones that reduce water use. In many parts of the world, there has never even been an

expectation that municipal water system customers pay for the infrastructure of the system, much less any cost imputed to the water itself. Water has been subsidized to keep it cheap. In the U.S., the cheapness of water, like electricity, or gasoline, has created a correlation between the low cost and the higher U.S. use rates compared to the use rates in Europe. When gas is cheap, the multitudes drive SUVs; when water is cheap, the multitudes put in private pools, lawn sprinklers, and garden waterfalls.

Recently a court decided the battle between Florida and Georgia over the water of the Chatahoochie River in Florida's favor, noting that Atlanta had long allowed unchecked and unplanned growth with no thought for water conservation. But Atlanta and its suburbs use an average of 120 gallons per day per person, while Florida as a whole uses 158 gallons per person per day, and South Florida, where I live, uses 179 gallons per person per day. Well over half of that, according to county records, goes to water landscape, especially lawns and golf courses, which should be using greywater if any at all.⁵ It is difficult to find the virtuous among the irresponsible when it comes to water.

Expanding Municipal Systems

From an environmental perspective, then, in a rational and reformed capitalist system, the cost of water should not only reflect the costs of treating and delivering it. In order that we can eventually afford to reach closed loop status where no water is lost or wasted, the cost of water should also reflect the cost of recovering it from wastewater. This requires funding the sewer systems necessary to keep wastewater separate from treated and untreated water. Just as nations are moving toward cap and trade systems for carbon emissions in an effort to include the cost of carbon pollution cleanup in the production of goods and services, so there should be a cost attributed to water use. If water has a real value – not only the value added by treatment and delivery – then water companies would have an incentive to fix the leakage rather than pay the cost of acquiring additional sources of water when expanding their systems. This would mean that if there is privatization, governments should not cede ownership of water resources to private companies. Only when the

price companies pay for each liter of water that they take from reservoirs exceeds the costs involved in recycling water will they have incentive to recover that liter and recycle it.

In many parts of the world advocates for the poor will exclaim that the poor cannot be expected to pay higher costs for water – they have no money! And yet, in many cities of the world the poor are already paying exorbitant rates for water because they must buy it from trucks in the absence of city water. In many cities, the poor could spend half as much for many times the amount of water they now buy, if they were connected to the municipal system. But who will pay to extend the municipal system to their neighborhoods, and to expand the capacity of the treatment plant, so that it can provide water to all these additional customers? While many poor can afford to pay the basic production costs of potable water, the infrastructure costs needed to deliver water to their neighborhoods are usually beyond their means.

A partial answer is actually in place in many poor neighborhoods around the world. Municipalities, and even private utility companies in poor neighborhoods, for decades have extended utilities to new, poor neighborhoods in stages. Initially they will run a single water line, or a single electric line, to a central point in the neighborhood. In the case of water, a single public faucet is installed. The newer of these, in order to conserve water and prevent waste, have spring handles, so that water only flows when manual pressure continues to hold the valve open. The faucet substitutes for the neighborhood well of centuries past. Women and children line up to draw water in the morning. Where the municipality operates the water system, these community faucets are often provided free of cost for health reasons. When private companies manage the water system, the common faucet is usually entrusted to an NGO or committee in the neighborhood. This group is responsible for collecting and paying a regular sum to the company. In some places this sum only ensures that water flows to the faucet for some limited hours a day. In others only a specified amount is released each day, and it is the responsibility of the community to allot it. For example, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 1992, DSK, a local NGO worked

with WaterAid, an international NGO. They began trying to persuade the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority, that slum dwellers had a moral right to public water and were ready to pay a fair price. The authority was suspicious. At first it approved two slum water points only when DSK agreed to act as guarantor for the bills. Gradually, however, it came to appreciate that slum dwellers paid their bills and maintained water points diligently through their users' committees. The authority also saw that extending its network to the slums reduced losses from illegal tapping. DSK went on to replicate its model across Dhaka and in 2007 the water authority agreed that over 200 water points registered to DSK could be switched to the slum dwellers.⁶

Installation of water faucets in new urban areas circling older cities is often made difficult by the haphazard spatial organization of the town. One of the more valuable activities of some NGOs in developing nations over the last few decades has been to work with groups planning invasions of unoccupied state, city or private land on the edge of a city. This is especially difficult because it is usually illegal. The NGOs provide expertise in planning the invasion on maps that leave space for roads, water and electric lines, churches and schools, as well as farmhouse plots with small gardens. This makes the resulting settlement orderly. Such planning facilitates the eventual provision of city services, by ensuring that utility companies have easier access.

Clearly justice would prefer a community faucet to the exorbitant prices involved in private resale of municipal water trucked to the new towns by entrepreneurs. Water conservation demands that waste be avoided through provision of pressure handles, and that these be kept in repair. But water conservation also demands that the poor allot some part of their income to pay for water. Not only is paying for water something they can do, and have been doing – many of them at extremely high rates – but paying for water is an important tool in instilling responsible water usage.

Advocacy in Light of Social Ethics

Increasingly throughout developing nations, new NGOs are springing up that represent environmental concerns. These environmental

NGOs and more traditional NGOs that work on poverty and human rights are interacting more frequently since their interests often overlap. Water is one of the issues on which environmentalists and advocates for the poor have not often seen eye to eye. Advocates for the poor often have a religious base while few of the environmental NGOs have a religious orientation. Most sacred texts were written many centuries before human density and industrialization made the healing powers of nature insufficient to ensure the sustainability of the biosphere. They tend to focus on distributing the fruits of nature within the human community rather than the need to sustain nature.

But there can no longer be any type of ethics that does not incorporate environmental ethics. How we make war, what we eat, where and how we live – every part of human – life must answer to environmental concerns, because all life is threatened. The poor are not immune. They are affected, often to a much greater extent than others, by environmental degradation. And the poor constitute such a huge part of the human community that it would be impossible to sustain the biosphere without involving them in the work. Justice for the poor in the struggle to save the biosphere will depend upon how successful we are in preventing the bulk of the sacrifices from falling on those with the least power to redress the situation. Success in this task will depend on the participation of the poor in the struggle.

Increasingly, religions are being pushed to shift from preaching charity toward the poor toward teaching justice for the poor. This shift not only requires that the poor themselves be brought into the advocacy activity, but also that they progressively accept other burdens of responsible adulthood as they can. One of those is paying for water.⁷



NOTES

1. Alejo Alvez, "Water As Private Property," *Latinamerica Press* 20 (October 31, 2007):4.
2. In Nairobi, for example, the cost of buying water from local vendors is eight times what municipal customers pay, according to African Population and Health Research Center, "Scarcity of Water in Nairobi's Slums Breeds Unhealthy Practices,"

Mar. 23, 2007,
www.aphrc.org/media/Water%20scarcity.html.

Else Chanduvi Jana, in "Equal Access," *Latinamerica Press* 20 (October 31, 2007) writes that "Sometimes, residents in some of the region's poorest neighborhoods pay between 5 to ten times more for a liter of water than wealthier residents in the same city." In Dhaka, Bangladesh, the poor pay vendors 20 times what municipal customers pay, according to Barney Jopson, "Water 'angels' bring hope to slum dwellers," www.FinancialTimes.com, November 30 2008 17:32.

3. St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, ed. Blackfriars Dominicans (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1964) 2a2ae, 66:2.
4. British House of Commons, "Water Prices and the Environment," 7th report, sess.1999-2000, HC597, Select Committee on the Environmental Audit, House of Commons, November 14 (HOCSC7), para. 225, www.parliament.the-stationary-office.co.uk/pa/cm1999900/cmselect/cmenvaud/597/59702.htm.
5. Fred Grimm, "State's Victory in Water War Not a Proud One," *Miami Herald*, July 20, 2009, vi Jopson, "Water 'angels'."
6. Barney Jopson, "Water 'angels' Give Back Dignity to Slum Dwellers," *Financial Times*, December 1, 2008.
7. Allen Bronsro, "Pricing Urban Water as a Scarce Resource: Lessons from Cities Around the World," in *Proceedings of the CWRA Annual Conference*, Victoria, B.C., Canada (Cambridge, Ontario: Canadian Water Resources Association, 1998).

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Water Bubbling Up

The Samaritan Woman's Talent for Missionary Work

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M.

Eco-Feminism Alters Standard Interpretation

In the early 1990's, some women theologians writing on the environment linked Christian dedication to the well-being of the earth with feminism's concern about empowerment of women. The convergence of these two movements was called "eco-feminism." The convergence arose because women activists saw that what was needed to preserve the earth was a conversion from humanity's impulse to dominate it. Men needed to shift from an attitude that they were entitled to exploit its natural resources (cf.

The (life-giving) water that Jesus gives is also the power of women to believe in themselves, and their awakening to a changed view of themselves as having more abundant life because of their relationship with Jesus.

Gen. 1:28 "fill the earth and subdue it") to a different stance – respect for the earth's natural integrity, care for it and tending of it – what is associated with the term "stewardship." Women theologians proposed there was a link between how the earth was being abused because of a male-identified attitude of superiority and domination, and how women suffered social and ecclesial inequality, violence and poverty because of the same male attitude of superiority over them as persons. The long philosophical tradition of dichotomizing reason as light, emotion as darkness; and maleness as spirit and femaleness as matter also was part of the foundation of eco-feminist theory. Thus, to work for a change in humanity's attitude toward care for the earth would necessarily impact the way men treated women and the way traditional dichotomies were healed or reconciled in the mind. As respect and care for the earth was promoted as a general social value, eco-feminists hoped that improvement in

women's treatment would be a correlative outcome.¹

As extension of eco-feminist tenets, I'd like to offer a reading of the well-known narrative about the Samaritan Woman's encounter with Jesus that considers the relationship between the theme of water and the empowerment of women. The water that Jesus gives is not just belief in himself as messiah and savior. The life-giving water is also the power of women to believe in themselves, and their awakening to a changed view of themselves as having more abundant life because of their relationship with Jesus. What changes within a woman's sense of herself unfold in the course of the dialogue about water at the well?

The usual interpretation of the encounter between Jesus and the Samaritan woman features the woman as a nervy outsider who challenges Jesus and argues with him, without knowing who he really is. Why is she at the well when Jesus stops at noon?(4:6) An urban legend, drawn from unchallenged biblical commentary over the years, proposes that she's drawing water at that hour because she is too ashamed of her past sins to mingle with other women early in the morning, the usual time. This is pure invention. Noon simply complements the fact that Nicodemus in the previous pericope met Jesus at night (3:2). The revelatory conversation between the two took place in the dark, about the unseen, mysterious unfolding of life in the womb. Gestation within a woman's womb symbolizes the process of birth, grace and divine movement in the soul of the believer. In the language of spirituality, it is the apophatic, hidden, dark, non-rational, unseen experience of the divine. The one who knows Jesus is born from above.

The Samaritan woman, on the other hand, personifies another kind of spiritual experience, known traditionally as the kataphatic, a realization of divine life in daylight, in full consciousness of its effect on the mind and heart. Jesus has a conversation with a man by night, and with a

woman by day. In the words of the psalmist, "For you, darkness and light are the same" (Ps. 139:12).

The usual view also presents her as a literalist about the meaning of water. In a patronizing view of the woman, Jesus patiently teaches her. She is gradually guided from a literalist understanding that the water Jesus is talking about involves more than what she can draw from the well. The water that Jesus gives is the capacity for belief and faith in himself. He gives assurance that believers will enjoy eternal life when they imbibe his message.

The woman has a dubious moral past going from husband to husband. If not a prostitute, her behavior is morally problematic because she has gone through so many relational changes. When

Jesus tells her he knows the whole story of her life, she is convinced he is a mind-reader, which means he is an all-seeing prophet. Embarrassed, she tries to distract him from his mind-reading by changing the subject to a dispute about whether worship should be in Jerusalem, and then changing it again to the topic of the Messiah. He then tells her that he is the Messiah. The woman goes and summons others in the town to hear the message of Jesus. She convinces them by exclaiming that Jesus knew all about her past, and they come to believe in him as well. Soon, she drops out of the picture because her only role was to bring the townspeople to believe in Jesus.

This standard characterization of the Samaritan woman presents a logical and narrative problem. There is no indication in the narrative that the talky woman, having had five husbands, is therefore a prostitute, a seductress or a woman who can't keep her commitments. If the townspeople are so impressed by her story about "a man who told me everything I ever did," (4:39), what logical cause-effect relation is there between telling them that Jesus had found her out, recounted all her sins to her – and their eagerness to see him? Is that really the reason they are convinced by her invitation to them? Are they eager for Jesus to embarrass them, and expose all their hidden sins too?

We must thus look to some other reading of the dialogue and its sequence and identify some of

The whole point of this narrative is to propose a woman, and a Samaritan, as the model for disciples and missionaries. She is a heroine in the gospel...

the logical problems with existing commentaries. She is a missionary to the Samaritans. Without having been present at Cana, where the disciples believed in him (2:11) she carries out the instruction of Jesus to "go and come back." She didn't see a miracle of water turned to wine, but she seems to understand his message about life-giving water long before the male disciples understand what he means by "food you do not know about" (4:32.) When they return after buying food, Jesus engages in a long instruction

with them about the need to imagine themselves as missionaries – to think of spiritual food, to recognize when fields are ripe for harvest, and to continue the spiritual work others have started (4:34-38). However, while they are receiving instruction, the Samaritan woman has already graduated, as it were, and is off carrying out the work of emissary of Jesus to her own community.

As a caution to Mariologists, the evangelist gives far more attention to the Samaritan woman's dialogue with Jesus at the well than to what Mary the Mother of Jesus says and does. To highlight the Samaritan woman's empowering energy and the talent Jesus recognized in her, the analysis will focus on her statements as launch-pads for what Jesus says.

Why Do You, A Jew, Ask Me, a Samaritan, for a Drink?

Jesus opens the conversation with the Samaritan woman by a request for her help, "Give me a drink." (4:7).

The setting and tone require this to be read as a request. Jesus begins from a posture of dependence and thirst, not mastery. He does not command the woman to give him water, as though he expects her to obey him, as a father directs a young daughter, as a soldier a civilian, a teacher a student, or a manager a subordinate. Instead, he asks first for a woman's help in assuaging a physical need, a human need, one that he shares with her. He has sat down by the well for the same reason that she has come – for water. He cannot quench his thirst unless he persuades this woman to assist him, and she responds willingly.

Does he think his status as a stranger in this city of Sychar will call for a positive response, where he might expect to be welcomed with a traditional middle-east gesture of hospitality? Or does he have some uncertainty that he will be identified, not just as a stranger in need, but as an enemy to be distrusted and repelled? The sun shines clear and hot at noon, but there is also ambiguity that clouds how Jesus is regarded. He is the outsider who has intruded into the space where neighbors know each other.

He is tired from the journey, and the disciples have gone off to get food. A characteristic of the Johannine evangelist is creation of a scene of dialogue between two persons. Literarily, getting the crowd of disciples off stage serves to focus the interchange between Jesus and the woman. Dramatically, having the disciples absent is probably an element in Jesus' favor. If he asks her

It is a gender reversal, Jesus
putting himself in the position of
the woman, and proposing she
make the request of him...

for water, she is only faced with the need of one person, not a crowd of thirsty men whom she will have to attend and feel taken advantage of. One man's need does not threaten her, while a dozen men might. If she were acting as a servant, obliged out of hospitality to draw water for them all, she would not be free enough to engage in conversation with Jesus. Thus, the initial empowerment of this woman is that she is not being treated as a slave or servant, whose role in life is to silently serve men whose needs are more highly valued than hers. Here, the manner of Jesus creates the condition for collaboration and mutuality between human beings, rather than assertion of power by one over the other.

The passage does not describe the Samaritan woman as afraid or hesitant, only curious. "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? (4:9) However, she immediately raises two controversial issues. The first is recognition that Jesus transgresses the social code: Men do not address women they do not know. He is not a member of her family or a neighbor. She immediately recognizes that Jesus, who asks her

for a drink of water, has ignored the conventions that govern relations between men and women.

Is this what defines the relationship of men to women – men ask, and women drop everything, interrupt what they were about to do, because a man's presence and question require her to respond? Does a woman exist first to respond to a man's needs before she takes care of her own need for water? Whose survival takes precedence? Does the urgency of a man, wherever he comes from, displace a woman's need?

The second controversial issue concerns ethnicity. She recognizes Jesus as non-Samaritan, a Jew. She immediately conjures up the differences between them that are linguistic, historical, ethnic, and theological. She is not afraid to raise the hard issues of potential hostility between them right at the beginning. If Jesus is asking for her to serve him a drink of water from her jug, won't he be rendering himself unclean by contact with the vessel she handles and uses in her own household?²

She is the one who can tell he is not a Samaritan. She is the one to articulate the "state of the question." She knows she is regarded by Jews, non-Samaritans, as the representative of a despised population, as less acceptable in the eyes of God, because her ancestors were defeated by the Assyrians 700 years before. She belongs to the race of the defeated and humiliated. The northern kingdom capitulated to invaders from the east long before Judea and Jerusalem in the south fell. The belief system of the Samaritans, the reason their kingdom fell, was labeled by prophets as heresy and infidelity to God's covenant.

In responding to his request for a drink of water, the woman effectively asks him to account for himself. She takes control of the interchange. The well where Jesus sits is hers. The territory and the city where he has stopped is hers. The means of drawing water from the well is hers. So is the conversation between them now hers. The issue could be framed this way: Why should she step out of her posture of being a despised Samaritan woman to give a Jewish man a drink of water?

Jesus gives the woman an enigmatic answer, which requires him to reverse roles with the woman. He suggests that she imagine herself in the position he is in with her, just as he asked her:

"If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, 'Give me a drink,' you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." (4:10)

It is a complicated hypothetical. Jesus assures her that he would have granted her request, had she asked him, with even better water than he is asking from her. This implies that the woman has not yet drawn up water to give to Jesus, and that he is still thirsty. So Jesus' response can be read as a somewhat playful, engaging challenge in which he side-steps discussion of whether she is going to give him a drink from her jug, or the gender and ethnic boundaries – the issues she raised. In effect, he says, gender doesn't matter to me, and ethnicity doesn't matter to me when it comes to satisfying our thirst when we are in need of water. We all need water. This need is the equalizer of relations and the conflict-resolver of tensions between men and women, between Jews and Samaritans.

What in the woman's response and readiness to talk signals to Jesus that he can discuss spiritual thirst, not just physical thirst? She is a complex person, and Jesus honors her intelligence, not just by a simple declarative followed by an imperative: "I can give you living water. So ask me." Instead, he engages her imagination in a hypothetical, which includes a reassurance. She surely would have been given what she asked for in the past, and therefore, she can be sure that if she asks now, Jesus will give her living water. In other words, Jesus does not require her to beg from him, or assume the role of a servile female. She is not required, like a conquered enemy, to pay tribute to a victor, or provide a quid-pro-quo for the privilege. Nor must she expect to be kept waiting because Jesus the Jew is so much more important than she, a Samaritan woman is. All she needs to do is ask, and Jesus will give it to her. The hypothetical is an extraordinary reversal of the domination-submission relationship that defines the social relations of men to women.

Sir, You Have No Bucket and the Well is Deep

Power roles are reversed because the woman is the one with the bucket. Jesus doesn't have one. The woman is the one to provide help to Jesus

because he cannot meet a primary need, thirst, on his own. She does not feel insulted by the hypothetical Jesus presents as an answer to her question, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask a drink of me, a woman of Samaria? To the declarative sentence of Jesus, she asks him another question, "Where do you get this living water?" But it picks up on his statement. She is listening to him and following his line of thought.

She notes that he does not have a bucket, nor does he have any idea how deep the well is. She tells him it is not a shallow well or easy to get water from this source. She implies he has no idea how long it might take for him to draw water from the well (4:11). She notes his lack of knowledge,

The conversation does not move by the initiative of Jesus. It is the woman who takes the lead intellectually and conversationally....She is attuned to him. But she stands her own ground.

his lack of an instrument to meet his need, his helplessness. This is the role women usually suffer – being uneducated, unskilled, even disabled as human beings when compared to men.

While Jesus started the conversation with a request, he does not initiate the discussion as it moves from topic to topic. Instead, he answers the questions posed by a woman. He is guided by the subjects she raises.

She apparently feels she can discuss substantive theological issues with him. Here is a man who listens to a woman. She can be herself. She feels that this man will engage her thoughts and her arguments, not dismiss them, or patronize her. He will not oppose her, scold her, demean her, trivialize her or demand that she hold the same thoughts he does. Her spirit is coming alive, and she feels confidence in Jesus' respect for her as a person.

Are You Greater Than our Ancestor Jacob?

The woman initiates another controversial issue. Theologically the Samaritans root their traditions in Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes. Does Jesus disagree with her people's traditions? Does he have disregard for them and think himself

superior? She is testing the position of Jesus by challenging him to defend or explain himself. But she is not coy. She speaks authoritatively about her own theological foundations. She states forthrightly where her deepest spiritual roots and loyalties lie – in the patriarchal tradition of Jacob, the father of the twelve tribes. The well belongs to “us” the Samaritans, not to the Jews of the north in Galilee or to the Jews of the south in Judea.

If there is living water anywhere, as a life-giving tradition, wouldn't it come from the

She is a woman of a certain
theological tradition, of a certain
place, of the water that comes
from this well, not any other.

deepest roots of a people's faith, from their foundational story, from the land itself made holy by where the patriarch and his descendants lived and pastured their flocks? In effect she says, I am a daughter of Jacob, not just a daughter of one of the tribes. She speaks of herself with great dignity and self-respect. She embodies a tradition unbroken by conquering armies, by exile, by geographic dispersal, by intermarriage or by loss of memory. She has a firm grasp of her genealogy and her spiritual ancestry.

She herself speaks for the tradition as a woman. She is the guardian of its biblical roots. She lives here, in the very geographical place that grounds all Jewish tradition. There was a tradition that on Mt. Gerizim, Jacob had his vision of angels ascending and descending the staircase from earth to heaven (Gen 28:16-18).³ She is speaking as a biblical theologian. The original well-spring for truth lies here. Before there was a temple in Jerusalem, long before the rise and triumph of David, the children fathered by Jacob with Leah and Rachel dwelled here. They lived here without great buildings, without a military fortress or defended settlement. But they were free. This was long before the enslavement of the tribes in Egypt. The family of Jacob didn't merely wander through this territory. They established a Jewish claim to this area, and the sign of their stability as a people and their claim to the land was that they pastured their flocks here. Jacob's well is right here.

This seems to be an anti-Mosaic and anti-

Davidic tract. She insists, in such an historical sequence and theological development, that she and her neighbors embody the covenant God made with Jacob and the people Israel, long before there was a Moses, a David or a temple in Jerusalem.

Again, Jesus does not enter into a theological debate with her over the superiority of the Mosaic covenant on Sinai when compared with the earlier covenant of God with Abraham or Jacob. There is no testing of theses, whether Judaism is better understood as the heritage of people descended from Jacob and rooted in pre-Mosaic patriarchal tradition, or a people whose identity is created by the Exodus and Sinai.

What seems to contradict this irenic posture of Jesus is the insertion of a polemical passage, “You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews.” Here, a redactor seems to intrude himself into the dialogue and argue on the side of Jews against Samaritans, reflecting the tensions between advocates of worship at Jerusalem versus advocates of worship at Mt. Gerizim.⁴

Give Me This Water

Instead of a theological discussion and learned rabbinical debate, Jesus turns the question from historical theology to spirituality. Everyone in the town who drinks from this well, the one where you come for water, will be thirsty again. He refers literally to the water from the well where he is sitting.

There are super-sessionist exegetes who parrot the idea that Christianity has replaced Judaism. They interpret this passage to mean that the patriarchal tradition of Jacob—and Judaism in general – cannot fulfill people's deepest spiritual thirst. But that meaning would contradict the respectful approach the evangelist shows Jesus taking in the dialogue. Jesus does not contradict, dismiss, or demean anything the Samaritan woman says about herself, about Jacob, or about the patriarchal tradition in which her faith is rooted. On the contrary, he shows respect for her and expresses a desire to relieve her of her daily labor. “But those who drink the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give them will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.” (4:13-14)

He does not say, “You will discover that being

a daughter of Jacob means little after you listen to me." Nor does he say, "Don't ever drink from that well again; it's useless to you and your people."

The woman's response is not a question, but now a request. "Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty or have to keep coming here

Jesus does not contradict, dismiss, or demean anything the Samaritan woman says about herself, about Jacob, or about the patriarchal tradition in which her faith is rooted. On the contrary, he shows respect for her and expresses a desire to relieve her of her daily labor.

to draw water." (4:15) This reflects a transition in the woman's consciousness. At this point, she is no longer asking Jesus questions. A change has taken place within her. Now she takes on the mentality and posture of Jesus who first spoke to her. She is making a request of him. Jesus had begun the conversation, "Give me a drink." She repeats his words to her. Opening a new conversational dynamic by reversing roles with Jesus, she asks him, "Give me this water."

It is the moment for Jesus to commission her: "Go, call your husband, and come back." (4:16) It is a remarkable sending. She is to go and come back to Jesus. She is to tell her husband about Jesus, and bring her husband back with her to the well where Jesus will be waiting for them.

In other words, she is to make quick work of it, and the expectation is that her husband will return with her in immediate response to her invitation. Jesus' words reflect his assumption about her that seems to counter social conventions – that she has the authority as a woman and as a spouse to expect willing responsiveness from her husband. It is the expectation of equality and mutuality of relations between women and men in marriage. A woman summoning her husband and telling him to come with her to meet Jesus? The fundamental social role of a woman is just the opposite. A woman awaits the initiative of her husband, remains invisible in private domestic space, avoids exposure of herself to the general public, answers when he calls her, and carries out what he commands her. So, when Jesus

commissions a wife to go summon her husband – we might say evangelize him – he is also outlining a fundamental role reversal for women in relation to men.

I Have No Husband

Jesus creates an opportunity for the woman to exercise her authority and autonomy in the very relationship which defines women's social and spiritual subordination. He encourages her to take the initiative, summon her husband and take the lead in bringing him back to Jesus with her. It is also an invitation for her to talk about the matters that are closest to her heart, the course of her life and her human struggles. "Tell me about your husband," would be implied by the invitation, "Go, call your husband and come back." Did the woman make an explanation that followed her statement, "I have no husband"? (4:17) She does not refuse to perform the act of calling people and bringing them back to Jesus. She only says she doesn't have a husband to call. The woman admits, at some point, "I have no husband." This means she identifies herself as unpartnered. She is not anyone's spouse. She doesn't keep house for a husband. She is not concerned about pleasing him. It is a statement of autonomy. She has come to draw water, not because she is doing her housewifely duties, but because she is taking care of herself. If she goes to call someone and comes back, it will not be her husband. It is a statement, too, that she is available to be sent on mission. She embodies Paul's counsel to the missionary – the unmarried and formerly married, that it is better to "remain as she is." (I Cor 7:40)

How would Jesus have known she had no husband, but had attempted marriage five times? There must have been a conversation in which she referred to her past relationships, her struggles and her sense of failure. As Gail O'Day has noted:

The popular portrait of the woman in John 4 as a woman of dubious morals, guilty of aberrant sexual behavior, derives from a misreading of John 4:16-18.... Jesus responds to the woman's words by telling her the story of her life...there are any possible reasons for the woman's marital history, and one should be leery of the dominant explanation of moral laxity.⁵

Of course, as one woman friend, a widow, humorously noted, "Why would she want to get

married five times? Was she just a dependent person and needed to have someone to be there?"

What is clear from the affirmation that the woman later receives from her neighbors is that she is a credible messenger (4:42). Jesus, respectful of her and having confidence in her, gives her a commission he doesn't yet give to his male disciples. He gives authority to a Samaritan woman to be his representative to her neighbors. The first potential disciple she might call would naturally be the person closest to her – her husband. This alludes to the early part of the gospel, where Andrew first turns to his own brother Simon Peter and brings him to Jesus (1:40-42). The pattern of discipleship in John does not show Jesus summoning them directly, calling them, "Follow me," from their fishing boats, as recounted in the synoptics. Rather, the call to follow Jesus in John's gospel comes indirectly, as a possibility of being associated with the Master. The invitation gets communicated one-on-one, through one's closest relationships, from one person to a relative or friend.

What follows the woman saying, "I have no husband" is probably the story of her life's struggles, her pain, loss and disappointments. But it also reveals her determination to start over, again and again, despite her failures and sadnesses. I asked a parish scripture study group what would account for the woman having had five husbands that had nothing to do with sinfulness or blame on her part? Immediately, the women offered several scenarios: "The husband had affairs... He was physically abusive... He got sick and died... He abandoned her... She couldn't have children." So, I said, since there is no reference to her being a sinner in the whole account of meeting Jesus at the well, where do we get the idea that she was a loose, lascivious seductress who went from man to man? If she wasn't a prostitute, what makes her so admirable and credible that Jesus chooses her as his messenger?

She has not sunk into despair, hopelessness or depression. She continues to live her life, maintain her presence to the world, and draw water to sustain herself. She is not deterred by the fact that she is a woman of ethnicity, or that her religious convictions are held in contempt by most

There must be a compelling reason for Jesus to have respect for this woman's intelligence and talent... What seems her messy past is ... a heroic narrative about her resourcefulness, her courage, her resiliency, her spirit of hope, her self-confidence, her almost miraculous power of self-re-invention and ability to start again.

people who live in the land of Israel. From the perspective of Jesus – which is the narrator's slant – we should be full of admiration and see her in a positive light. What encouragement her life story can give others! She is the ideal person to send

out on a missionary journey. She is the sort of person who could draw anyone out of the pit of despair and give them hope for a better future.

"Sir, I See You Are a Prophet" – Which Prophet?

Jesus says, "You have spoken truly, 'I have no husband'; for you have had five husbands, and the one you have now is not your husband." In other words, he sums up the story she tells him, which is her struggle to survive a series of marriages, none of which lasted. And she is not finished trying. "The one you have now is not your husband." But she does not define herself as the wife of anyone. Perhaps she is also saying that she is not subservient to any man. The meaning of "husband" is a reference to the man who has power over the woman, whose person is more important than a woman's.

When the woman says, "Sir I see that you are a prophet," this could mean she recognizes that Jesus has unusual powers of listening and attention to a woman, not that he has divine super-human knowledge that exposes her secrets.⁶ He has heard her long disclosure and put the pieces together as her story of being a survivor of many losses. Rather than Jesus having extra-sensory intuition, like a mind-reader, and shocking her with a "gotcha" revelation to prove his superiority over her, tearing away the thin veil of her personal privacy, we have to hear the words as compassionate acknowledgment. Jesus has heard

everything she said. He understands what she has gone through. This is what a prophet is, at least one the woman would define as a prophet. A prophet is an extraordinary human being who behaves in a more enlightened way toward women than men usually do.

Is there a dispute among the Samaritans concerning which prophets should be regarded as spokespersons for the faith? Should only the Jerusalem-based prophets from the south, like Isaiah and Ezekiel, be considered authoritative?

What are the characteristics of a prophet? Wouldn't Elijah from the north count as a prophet of equal stature? It must be assumed that the woman has previously expressed her own opinion about the characteristics of a prophet.

For her, a prophet is not an other-worldly man, a fanatic, a dreamer disconnected from this life and the present moment, preoccupied with a future political triumph, creating a cult around himself. Why should Samaritans regard as prophets those whose writings condemn Samaritans, such as Isaiah? (cf. Is. 8:4, that the riches of Samaria would be carried away by the king of Assyria, 9:9 the Samaritans having pride and arrogance of heart, 10:9, comparing Samaria to the enemy Damascus, 10:10 Samaria as a place whose idols have been destroyed).

Why should her people have regard for the prophet Ezekiel who condemned Samaria as the elder daughter of the faithless woman Jerusalem who whored herself? (Ez 16:46) Why should her people in Samaria let themselves be insulted and criticized by Ezekiel for their past political alliances with Assyria and Egypt and then be called a daughter of the whore Oholah who set the stage for Jerusalem's defeat? (Ez 23:1-10). Great prophets like these had no praise for Samaria or sympathy for Samaritans.

In the eyes of the Samaritan woman, however, Elijah from the north could be the model of the true prophet. He is the prophet who sought help from the widow of Zarephath, "Bring me a little water in a vessel so I may drink." (I Kings 17:10). He is a prophet who doesn't insult or condemn a woman, but asks for her help. Like Elijah, Jesus is

a man who talks kindly to a woman, expresses a need for her help, engages in ordinary conversation, shows respect for her, seeks to understand her life, listens sympathetically to her struggles, and eventually does something to relieve her worries. Because of Elijah, and the miraculous replenishment of the flour and oil, the widow and her son had enough to eat during the famine. Jesus assures the Samaritan woman that she will have water to drink. He seems concerned about her needs and her survival.

The one who recognizes that Jesus is the giver of water,... is the person who can speak for Jesus, ...The woman proves that she is a person with communication skills needed for evangelical outreach.

From the Samaritan woman's perspective, a prophet like Elijah enters into the daily needs of people, rather than lords himself over the community. She recognizes in Jesus the presence of a man who

consoles ordinary townspeople, hears their questions, responds to what a woman feels, and deals with the urgency of the present situation, not a far-off future. In a similar way, the prophet Elijah entered into the ordinary life of the woman and stayed in her house. His own survival depended on her help, just as hers depended on his prayer. So it is perhaps with an intuition that Jesus is a man who reminds her of Elijah that she says to him, "Sir, I see you are a prophet." When she and her neighbors offer him hospitality, (4:40) she is behaving toward Jesus as the widow did toward Elijah the prophet. The widow protected Elijah and gave him shelter in her house.

You Say that the Place Where People Must Worship is Jerusalem.

The woman takes the initiative in introducing another controversial theological topic. She can trust that Jesus will follow her lead and respond to the issue she raises. "Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is Jerusalem." (4:20) So where should religious practice be grounded? In patriarchal tradition? In Davidic nationalism? In tribal roots, patriarchal history, and faithfulness to a pre-Exodus rural tradition with worship centered at Mount Gerizim?⁷ Or should religious practice find its truest expression as an evolution of earlier belief – culminating in an urban, national identity

created by King David, with its theocratic symbol of the temple built by Solomon at Jerusalem? In the desert or in the city? The woman articulates the tensions that divide sects, pit traditionalists against progressives, and create theoretical chasms between classicists from the post-modernists of her day.

Jesus' response avoids taking sides in a dispute that cannot be resolved by argument within a geographical framework. The place of true worship is neither Mt. Zion nor Mt. Gerizim. Jesus shifts and broadens the subject to include the persons who worship, the nature of worship itself, and the one who is worshiped. "The hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem...true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father seeks such as these to worship him." (4: 21, 23). Jesus does not hesitate to open up the topic of worship within a highly intellectual, philosophical and spiritual framework. It is as though he is inviting the woman to participate in a graduate seminar in theology! He shows his respect for her ability to understand him. He does not dismiss or minimize her challenge to him about his position on the dispute about the temple location; rather, he develops her questions. The dynamic illustrates his affirmation of her that she is a dialogue partner with him in a discussion they are mutually developing. Jesus affirms and honors her intelligence.

I Know that Messiah is Coming

The woman responds, as a woman of faith, with an expression of her deepest spiritual hopes. "I know that Messiah is coming...When he comes he will proclaim all these things to us." (4:25). She is seeking a resolution to all these theological problems, not by winning a debate with Jesus, but by surrendering to a revelation that will be made by a heaven-sent person to "us." She sees the Messiah as speaking to all believers, whoever they are. This includes a Jewish man with whom she is speaking. Despite the controversies, she is a spiritual idealist. She lives in personal expectation

of a messianic age. She is hoping for universal peace among disputing factions and clarity about what God's intentions are. The proclamation from God's anointed will bring everyone into spiritual unity and theological accord.

She lives in personal expectation of a messianic age. She is hoping for universal peace among disputing factions and clarity about what God's intentions are. The proclamation from God's anointed will bring everyone into spiritual unity and theological accord.

In light of the disputes discussed with Jesus, she must expect that the Messiah will bring enlightenment about relations between men and women, about the authority of Jacob in relation to Moses, Jacob in relation to David, about

where to worship – Mt. Gerazim or Mt. Zion – about the rights of Samaritans over Jews, about who is and who is not a prophet, and about the respective duties of husbands and wives. What the Messiah will resolve is not merely the question of where to worship.

The woman has engaged Jesus in a conversation where her own self-disclosure lays the foundation for his self-revelation. She has made the moment safe for him to tell her about himself. In response, Jesus can and indeed does reveal himself to her as the Anointed One she expects. "I am he, the one who is speaking to you." (4:26). Jesus could never have made this revelation to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was absorbed in trying to understand the concept of being born from above (4:4). Nicodemus came to Jesus as a student in need of guidance. The woman, on the other hand, engages Jesus as a partner in dialogue. She is the one to ask the questions, and Jesus answers her. The respective roles of master and disciple are reversed and blurred in this exchange.

Leaving Her Water Jar

When the disciples return, the woman leaves her water jar and goes back to the city to tell all her neighbors – not a husband – about Jesus and call them back to meet him (4:28). A logical line, one that we would expect the evangelist to have included somewhere in the narration, is never stated: "And after saying this, she lowered her jug into the well, drew it up with the rope that was hanging there, and gave him water to drink. And

so his thirst was satisfied."

On the meaning of the jug left behind, Bruce Vawter remarks that when the woman went off to tell her neighbors about Jesus, she left her jug of water behind for Jesus to drink – this was a sign he had a human need and was still thirsty.⁸ It could also be an expression of the woman's hospitality. If the disciples returned, and she saw they had no jug, leaving hers by the well allows them to draw water for themselves after she goes off to visit her neighbors. The jug is also a pledge of her intent to return. Jesus had said earlier, "Go, call your husband, and come back" (4:16). The jug symbolizes her responsiveness and commitment to Jesus. She will go, and she will come back. She found people in the village to offer Jesus and the disciples a place to stay. Through her agency, Jesus stays there two days, presumably with his disciples as guests of the Samaritans along with him (4:40). The jug was the sign that she would not abandon them or leave them without resources. She would indeed come back to help them.

When the woman leaves the water jar behind, it could also be a sign, on another level, that she is finished with "women's work" of waiting on men, of being relegated to perform physical tasks and manual labor. She has entered a new phase of her life, and the manual labor she did before has been left behind for her new work of preaching, testifying and attracting others to Jesus. Now she has moved to a higher level of dignity and ability. She qualifies for the intellectual role of teacher and the authoritative role of witness. Because they now have her jug, the disciples of Jesus are able to draw their own water and meet their own needs from the well of Jacob.

The jug she leaves behind is thus the symbol of her own empowerment as a woman, and the empowerment in faith that she provides her neighbors, as well as the male disciples of Jesus. The Samaritan woman's encounter with Jesus at the well makes public the fact that she is an evolved personality, the exemplary disciple,

respected community leader, and model for missionary service. The Samaritan woman's perspective allows her to approach people without regard to their gender, national identity or race. She shares the universal vision of Jesus.⁹ She is the water bubbling up to life eternal.

The endorsement Jesus gives her is a paradigm for the affirmation women deserve in society and church.



NOTES

1. Anne Primavesi, *From Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).
2. Charles H. Talbert, *Reading John: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles* (New York: Crossroad, 1992): 112-113.
3. PHEME Perkins, "John" in *New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer and Roland Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1990): 957, par. 61.
4. The author attributes this observation that 4:22 reflects intra-Palestinian rivalry between Mt. Zion and Mt. Gerizim to Prof. David Flusser. See Robert T. Fortna, *The Fourth Gospel and Its Predecessor* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988): 263, Note 66.
5. Gail R. O'Day, "John" in *The Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe, (SPCK: London, Louisville, KY: Westminster- John Knox Press, 1992): 296.
6. Bruce Vawter, C.M., "The Gospel According to John," in *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed. Raymond E. Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer and Roland Murphy (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968): 432, par. 77.
7. See Talbert, *Reading John*, p. 115.
8. Vawter, "John" in *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, p. 432, par. 78.
9. See Theresa Okure, "Jesus and the Samaritan Woman (Jn 4:1-42) in Africa," *Theological Studies* 70 (February, 2009): 401-418.

Wisdom that Endures--1980

Seeking God: Prayer and Nature

Mary Clare Yates, R.S.M.

Notation

The yellow-bellied sapsucker, indigo bunting, and cedar wax-wing – these and their feathered cohorts have colored and noted nature for me. I am a birdwatcher. It is a statement I have learned to speak with caution. In self-protective moments—fearful of being patronized or hearing bird-watching dismissed once more as that odd thing I do – I will immediately state to an appropriate audience that bird-watching is contemplative. (Now, dare make fun of it!) And I do believe it possesses contemplative aspects. It is unhurried, patient, waiting, quiet, and searching; the requisites of bird-watching are too infrequent in our mobile and fast-paced lives.

Bird-watching offers beauty, joy and discovery. I recall that unexpected delight of seeing my first tufted titmouse, the adventure of sighting the shy pileated woodpecker and the spying of my first ruby-crowned kinglet who clearly signaled his identity by raising the usually flat scarlet head feathers to form the ruby crown of the kinglet's name.

When I anticipate an appeal to the contemplative character of bird-watching will not fend off someone mocking something I treasure, I revert to the British phrase "birding." Its whimsy carries the day for those who might ridicule the British birders and their birding. To me, Catherine McAuley and Frances Warde are

Leisure gives capacity to the spirit
to soar in festive celebration.

women who have understood why I go bird-watching and the significance of nature in prayer. The reality is that birds have prolonged and made more frequent my times with nature. I have also come to recognize that for me bird-watching and nature are ways to God. And in today's world I believe that Catherine McAuley and Frances Warde might very well be my companions—with or without binoculars—on trails through white

pinetrees, along an ocean shore, or on mountain foothills.

Birding and More

Nature is God's mercy to me. It is what purges my soul. A walk in the woods or along a lake shore is more than a breath of fresh air. It is what corrects imbalance, misdirection, confusion and scatteredness. Centeredness is restored. God's world has been righted – "the world is charged with the grandeur of God."¹

How many times in prayer services have you heard these lines of e.e. cummings: "i thank you god for most this amazing day!"² or Gerard Manley Hopkins:

Glory be to God for dappled things –
For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
For rose moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;...³

The content of these poems is an enduring part of my life. The mere sound of the kingfisher's rat-a-tat cry or sighting this bird's top-heavy body saves for me what Robert Frost says in "Dust of Snow": "some part of a day I had rued."⁴ For me, the sight or sound of the kingfisher typifies nature's constant showing of God – Her delight and presence. But most of all the kingfisher when sighted evokes gratitude and joy, and an awareness of God. It is an inexpressible intuition of God. It is a total gift of God.

The wonder of nature is this: One does not present oneself to nature with the intention of seeing through a glass, now clearly. Time is spent with or without specific deliberation or intentional reflection. Nature and its God are let to be. As God enlivens us from the miniature delight of a hummingbird to the silent flying great horned owl, to the pacing action of a coyote or the flash of a brook trout, from the broken glass rounded by waves to the sculpture of sand dunes, we become more responsive to life around us. An invitation has been given by God. The profound insight which flows from being

attentive bestows a renewal of perspective.

To be present to nature for what it is in itself and not for what I can do for oneself is leisure. Such presence is in a very real sense the description of worship offered by Josef Pieper in *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*. Pieper writes:

For leisure is a receptive attitude of mind, a contemplative attitude, and it is not only the occasion but also the capacity for steeping oneself in the whole of creation."⁵

The power to know leisure is the power to step beyond the boundaries of the workaday world and reach out to super-human, life-giving existential forces that refresh and renew us before we turn back to our daily work. Only in genuine leisure does a "gate to freedom" open.⁶

Nature acts both as "hospiter" and as simplifier. It is a recaller of persons facilitating our recognition that God is present to us through many persons and in many ways. Such seeing is a clarifier of life. The destiny of nature is clear and this simplicity of purpose contrasts with human groping for possessions, power, and prestige. Nature without being sentient nevertheless directs our approaches to God and Her kingdom on earth. Decisions in the light of the community of Mercy and its charism can be chosen with more integrity.

Nature's fundamental gifts of hospitality and simplicity reflect the charism of the Sisters of Mercy. Fr. Marcel Gervais in *Middle Classes, the Poor, God*, said that the conditions of the poor in society reveal how present or non-present the kingdom of God is on planet Earth. The author also argues that contact with the poor must be maintained so that the illusions and delusions enveloping the middle and upper classes can be recognized. To a religious community of women with a history of preferential choice for the economically poor, nature graces us by reminding us of the gifts of the "poor" – the little, the obscure and the drab – as well as the gifts of the "rich" – the spectacular and the awesome.

Nature is obedient to its Creator. Its aberrations are the result of human intervention and meddling. Nature proclaims that the world is well-ordered. It simplifies. The message of God's providence is heard. The lilies of the field

may not be everywhere, but sparrows are. Nature opens one to the weak and the powerful, the renowned and the unknown, the observant and the non-observant, the beautiful and the plain, the commonplace and the magnificent.

Nature excludes no person. The gifts of nature – simplicity, hospitality, clarification and leisure – are offered in countless ways and places. Consider the delicate goatsbeard that grows in cracked city sidewalks; small gardens or vast fields of grain that nurture; sunrises that tint the morning or sunsets that dye the skies of suburb, inner city and countryside alike.

Nature assists us in maintaining, keeping or regaining – even if briefly – that childlike sense of wonder which opens out the soul wide-eyed to God and to all her creatures and creation. With wonder comes delight and joy in the surprise and discovery of what is around us. Nature summons us to attend to its source. In the inner city the maple's crimson hues seem more brilliant. There, snow transforms charred buildings with bold black and white designs. To those who see, the first sign of buds and leaves of flowers and trees are an unfolding of life and vitality. To those who listen, the first singing of birds proclaims with jubilee the coming of spring. And "Sumer is icumen in, Lhude sing cuccu!"⁸

The crunch of winter snow and the gentle spring rainfall call us to God. The wonders of our God are everywhere.

Nature also offers whimsy and humor to everyone. Remember the diving loon that played hide-and-seek with Henry David Thoreau. The loon always won. In *Walden* Thoreau tells of this duck:

Each time, when he came to the surface, turning his head this way and that, he coolly surveyed the water and the land, and apparently chose his course so that he might come up where there was the widest expanse of water and at the greatest distance from the boat. It was surprising how quickly he made up his mind and put his resolve into execution. He led me at once to the widest part of the pond, and could not be driven from it. While he was thinking one thing in his brain, I was endeavoring to divine his thought in mine. It was a pretty game, played on the smooth surface of the pond, a man against a loon. Suddenly your adversary's checker disappears

beneath the board, and the problem is to place yours nearest to where his will appear again.⁹

And, to those who see, there is the raccoon comfortably perched in a tree. He watches with solemn mien the humans below. Or, blue jays with dive-bombing swoops establish a house porch as a safety zone for their stranded fledgling. These same jays establish the porch as off-limits for humans. Thus, for the homeowners, side and back doors only, please!

At Point Pelee National Park in Canada, a bilingual sign heralds a turtle-crossing: "la passage des tortues." In ordinary life one encounters few turtle crossings and there is something therapeutic about traversing a turtle crossing – "une passage des tortues." Nature helps distract us from our sometimes pompous and exaggerated sense of self-importance. We are enabled to laugh at ourselves and are gently reminded of our tendencies toward a Jehovian approach to life and action. Our time and the time of God do not always mesh. But Nature's continuous accord with the Creator's will recalls the patience taught us as Israel awaited the Messiah. As Mary Agnes Villani, a Mercy from Argentina, writes:

The Lord is the master of history: He enters it from where He is least expected and in a matter that is not expected.¹⁰

Sighting

Perhaps Nature become a glimpse of *Paradise Lost*. Johannes Metz in *Poverty of Spirit* writes:

There is a moment (cf. Col. 4:5, Eph. 5:16) when opportunity knocks, when woman can integrate the elements of her life and make them whole.¹¹

I understand Metz's moment of decision for wholeness and holiness of person as assent to both the infinity of poverty of the human who (paradoxically) in God possesses infinite richness. Nature does not necessarily effect such a significant surrender to God but it does enable insights that illumine, ready or call one to the

fullness of a life in which integrity of intention, direction and action become the interpretation and expression of God's will and love as the person strains toward what is true life.

Final Sighting

And for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs –
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! Bright wings.²



NOTES

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3. Hopkins, "Pied Beauty," in *Norton Anthology*, pp. 888-89.
4. Robert Frost, "Dust of Snow," in *A Pocketbook of Robert Frost's Poems* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1946): 240.
5. Josef Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture* (New York: Mentor Book, 1963): 41.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
7. See Canadian Religious Conference, *Middle Classes, The Poor, God* (Ottawa, Canada: Canadian Religious Conference, 1979).
8. "Cuccu," in Rolf Kaiser, *Medieval English* (Berlin: West Germany/Rolf Kaiser, 1961): 463.
9. Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (New York: Modern Library, 1965): 211.
10. Mary Agnes Villani, R.S.M., "Reflections on the Argentine Experience," Remarks given at the Provincial Chapter of the Province of Detroit, Sisters of Mercy of the Union of the United States of America, February 16, 1980.
11. Johannes Baptist Metz, *Poverty of Spirit* (Paramus, N.J.: Newman Press, 1968): 44-45.
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Contributors


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Kathleen Connolly, R.S.M. (West Midwest) was born in Oakland, California. One cousin was past bishop of the diocese of Oakland, and she has two priest uncles and several cousins who were missionary priests and nuns in Africa. Professed in 1961, she taught for 22 years in San Francisco, Los Angeles and Bakersfield. She then volunteered to be part of the Mercy Federation's New Foundations project in Pocahontas, Virginia, where she was a social worker for Lutheran Family Services and for Children's Protective Services. Later she worked as a social worker in Shasta County, California and for a foster family agency in Redding, California. Her next assignment, working with refugee children for Catholic Charities of San Jose, brought her in contact with foster children from Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia. Interested in seeing for herself what life was like in the refugee camps, she went to Sudan to celebrate her golden jubilee. She gives an account of her work at a project sponsored by Mercy Beyond Borders.

M. Gratia L'Esperance, R.S.M. (New York, Pennsylvania, Pacific West) holds an M.A. in French from Middlebury College, Vermont, and an M.Div. from St. Bernard's Seminary, Rochester, NY. She has ministered in elementary, secondary and college level education, including field education at St. Bernard's Seminary and diocesan adult education. Her social justice activities include the Interfaith Alliance of Rochester since 2000, where she served two years as president and member of the board of directors, with community outreach involving immigration, burial for the indigent, unionization of hotel workers and voter registration. Since 1981, she was justice coordinator for the Rochester Community, and since then she has worked in various capacities with Mercy Center with the Aging. She has edited the 200-page *Resource Guide for Planning the Care of Aging Loved Ones* since 1985, and currently volunteers with the Alzheimer's Association in Rochester, NY.


Christine Gudorf, Ph.D. is Professor of Religious Ethics, Modern Christianity, Feminism and Development at Florida International University. She holds two M.A. degrees from Union Theological Seminary in New York. She holds a Ph.D. in Religion from Columbia/Union Theological Seminary. From 1978 to 1993 she taught on the faculty of Xavier University of Cincinnati, tenured and promoted. In 1993, she moved to FIU. She is author of six books and many articles, both scholarly and popular, on social ethics, feminist issues, sexuality and family, and human rights. She presented the paper, "Water: Human Right and Public Good" at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in November, 2009. Her other writings are catalogued and available at the site of Archives of Women in Theological Scholarship, Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary.



Constance Kozel, R.S.M. (Mid-Atlantic) holds a Ph.D. in philosophy from The Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C. She has served on the full time faculty of Misericordia University in Dallas PA and Salve Regina University in Rhode Island, and part time at Mount St Agnes College in Baltimore; King's College, Wilkes-Barre, Penn State University/ Wilkes-Barre Campus and Luzerne County Community College, Nanticoke, PA. Other positions included a stint at Genesis Farm in New Jersey, the Interfaith Peace and Justice Center in Wilkes-Barre and Mercy Hospital in Johnstown, PA. Currently she is a retreat and workshop director.

Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. (West Midwest) has a Ph.D. from the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. She taught biblical studies at the seminary, university and graduate level, and also served in college and graduate school administration from 1984-2000. Subsequently, she obtained a J.D. from Lincoln Law School of San Jose. She was admitted by the California State Bar and is presently an attorney in private practice in the areas of employment law, wills and trusts and elder law. She is adjunct faculty for a constitutional law seminar, Religion and Law, at Lincoln. Published in feminist theology, biblical interpretation, and law, she serves as editor of *The MAST Journal*.

Mary Clare Yates, R.S.M. (West Midwest) holds an M.A. in literature from the University of Detroit, and a diploma in communications from Loyola of Montreal, Quebec. She has a background in elementary and secondary teaching, and radio program production. She studied Spanish in Cuernavaca and Guadalajara, Mexico, as well as at MACC in San Antonio, Texas. From 1974 to 1983 she was Director of Communications for the Detroit Sisters of Mercy. She then served in rural Hispanic ministry in the Amarillo diocese, Texas from 1983 to 1992 and in pastoral ministry at Ste. Anne de-Detroit Church. She is presently Director of Children's Programs at Matrix Theatre in Detroit, an after-school arts program that links 8-11 year olds with mentor artists, and produces events with original scripts, music, puppetry and movement.



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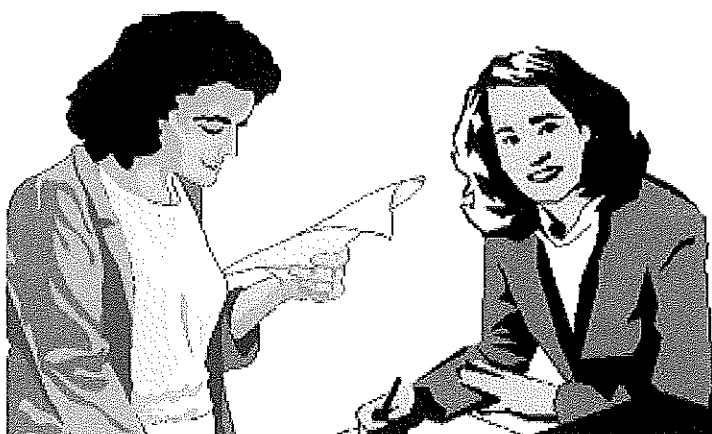
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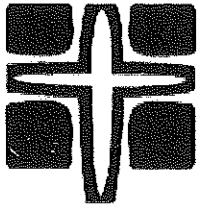
MAST, the Mercy Association in Scripture and Theology, met for the first time in June 1987 at Gwynedd-Mercy College in Gwynedd Valley, Pennsylvania. Called together by Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M. and Mary Ann Getty, twenty Mercy theologians and Scripture scholars from fourteen regional communities formally established the organization to provide a forum for dialogue and cooperation among Sisters of Mercy and associates. The stated purpose of the organization is to promote studies and research in Scripture, theology and related fields; to support its members in scholarly pursuits through study, writing, teaching and administration; and to provide a means for members to address issues within the context of their related disciplines.

MAST has been meeting annually since then, and the organization now numbers fifty, with members living and working in Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America, as well as in the United States. Aline Paris, R.S.M., currently serves as MAST's executive director. MAST held its annual meeting in Philadelphia, at St. Raphaela Center June 18-20, 2010. **MAST's 25th Anniversary annual meeting will be held June 16 – 18, 2011 at College of St. Mary in Omaha, Nebraska.** Members act as theologians in the Church and carry on theological work in their respective disciplines and ministries. They also seek to be of service to the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy by providing a forum for ongoing theological education.

For information on becoming a member and being added to MAST's mailing list please contact the association's Executive Director, Aline Paris, R.S.M by e-mail at aparis@csm.edu or by mail at College of Saint Mary, 7000 Mercy Road, Omaha, NE, 68016.

Dues can be paid by check, payable to MAST and sent to the association Treasurer, Marilee Howard, R.S.M at 3920 W. Land Park Drive, Sacramento, CA 95822. Inquiries regarding dues can be e-mailed to mhoward@mercysisters.org.

Since 1991, *The MAST Journal* has been published three times a year. Members of the organization serve on the journal's editorial board on a rotating basis, and several members have taken responsibility over the years to edit individual issues. Maryanne Stevens, R.S.M., was the founding editor of the journal, and Eloise Rosenblatt, R.S.M., currently serves in that capacity.



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