

I am the Alpha and the Omega,  
the Beginning and the End.  
I will give water from the well  
of life freely to anyone.

# WATER FOR LIFE IN DEFENSE OF OUR "SISTER WATER"

*How Religious  
can express Reverence  
and Concern for  
the precious gift of Water*

Prepared by  
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## INTRODUCTION :

Water is essential to sustain the Earth and its inhabitants.

The United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2003 an International Year of Freshwater to call the world's attention to the crisis surrounding a most precious resource, water.

What is the water crisis about? Some would say that it is about scarcity and a growing population. Others would say that it is about distribution, waste, and lack of reverence for water in a materialistic and consumer society. Others would say that it is about the privatisation of water supply services and ownership - with 95% these activities still controlled by the public sector.



Every citizen has a birthright to water as well as to health care and education.

Access to such basic goods is not a matter of choice, but a Human Right.

## IN ENGLISH:

12. **International Water Working Group:** [www.citizen.org/cmep/water](http://www.citizen.org/cmep/water)
13. **Save Water:** <http://www.savewater.com.au/default.asp>: a resource recommended by Planet Ark. (English).
14. **Greenhouse gas emissions from Dams:** for a free pdf file copy of the 24 page report in English, go to:  
<http://www.im.org/programs/greenhouse/index.asp?id=pt1.html>
15. **Water Barons:** <http://www.icij.org/dtaweb/water/default.aspx> (a series of articles on multinationals and their search for control of water – (Analysts predict that within the next 15 years in Europe and North America, these companies will control of 65 percent to 75 percent of what are now public waterworks
16. **110 ways to save water** – English -  
<http://www.wateruseitwisely.com/waterSavingTips/100tips.html>
17. **Visioning a sustainable community** –English - A process on how to work out a vision for your community. [http://www.wri.org/action/action\\_vision.html](http://www.wri.org/action/action_vision.html)
18. **Polaris Institute:** [www.polarisinstitute.org](http://www.polarisinstitute.org)
19. **Global water outlook:** <http://www.ifpri.org/media/water2025.htm> - English -. This web site links water and food security and has several free books to be downloaded or ordered.
20. **Water Observatory:** <http://www.waterobservatory.org/>

## IN GERMAN /PORTUGUESE/SPANISH/FRENCH/ITALIAN:

21. [www.netzwerk-afrika-deutschland.de](http://www.netzwerk-afrika-deutschland.de)
22. **Tierra America:** - Portuguese and English -:  
[http://www.tierramerica.net/agua\\_2002/index.shtml](http://www.tierramerica.net/agua_2002/index.shtml)
23. **People's World Water Forum (Florence):** - Italian -  
<http://www.cipsi.it/contrattoacqua/forum-acqua/it/index.htm>
24. **Brazil Social Forum – Water:** - Portuguese -  
<http://www.estadao.com.br/ext/ciencia/agua/>
25. **Water 2003** – Italian, French and German -  
<http://www.wasser2003bildung.ch/>
26. **Ecologists in Action:** – Spanish -  
<http://www.ecologistasenaccion.org/accion/agua/home.htm>
27. **Eco Portal** – Spanish -: <http://www.ecoport.net/temas/agua.htm>
28. **Save Water and Energy: (technical advice):** - Spanish -  
<http://www.ahorraragua.com/>
29. **Ministry of the Environment (France):**  
<http://www.environnement.gouv.fr/dossiers/eau/default.htm>
30. **Evian Document:** -English and French -  
[http://www.g8.fr/evian/english/navigation/2003\\_g8\\_summit/summit\\_documents/water - a\\_g8\\_action\\_plan.html](http://www.g8.fr/evian/english/navigation/2003_g8_summit/summit_documents/water - a_g8_action_plan.html)

powerful, leaving the less powerful thirsty. Inaction on our part will have profound consequences for life in all its forms and especially for the vulnerable on our Mother Earth.

## SEE

### A Few Facts About Water...

The poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge in “Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner” says: “Water, water everywhere and not a drop to drink”. Why do we need to become water efficient? Fresh water is increasingly scarce today – the UN World Water Development Report has predicted that “by the middle of this century, at worst 7 billion people in sixty countries will be water-scarce, at least 2 billion people in 48 countries.

### Consider these facts:

1. Almost 98% of the water on planet Earth is salt water, unfit for human consumption. Less than 1% of total freshwater is available for our use; the majority of it is locked in polar snow and ice<sup>2</sup> To put it another way: Of every hundred litres of water less than half a teaspoon is fresh water available for human use.
2. Global water consumption has risen almost tenfold since 1900. World population is expected to increase by 45% in the next thirty years, whilst freshwater wastage is expected to increase by 10%.
3. Recent estimates is that *climate change* will account for about 20% of the increase in global water scarcity<sup>3</sup>.
4. Other factors influencing scarcity are: i) Degradation of water bodies; water tables, rivers, wetlands and bays. ii) Inequality of distribution. iii) Cross border conflicts. iv) Privatization.
5. According to the United Nations’ 1998 Human Development Report, three-fifths of the 4.4 billion people in the developing world lack access to basic sanitation and almost a third have no access to clean water.

<sup>2</sup> UNEP, Global Environmental Outlook.

<sup>3</sup> UN World Water Development Report.

## FOR REFLECTION AND PRAYER

We invite you to gather in community or with friends for reflection and prayer using the format below.

Arrange a simple centre for your prayer with a bowl of water.

**CALL TO PRAYER:** Creator God, whose Spirit moved over the face of the waters, who gathers the seas into their places, and directs the courses of the rivers, who sends rain upon the earth that it should bring forth life: we praise you for the gift of water. Create in us such a sense of wonder and delight in this and all your gifts, that we might receive them with gratitude, care for them with love, and generously share them with all your creatures, to the honour and glory of your holy name.<sup>28</sup>

**SCRIPTURE** Psalm 65

**SILENT REFLECTION:**

**CREEDAL STATEMENT:**

- I believe that water belongs to the earth and to all species
- I believe that water must be conserved for all time.
- I believe that polluted water must be reclaimed.
- I believe that water is best protected in natural watersheds.
- I believe that water is a public trust to be guarded at all levels of government.
- I believe that an adequate supply of clean water is a basic human right.

**FAITH SHARING:** Share something you learned from reading this booklet on water. Was there anything that surprised you? Disturbed you?

**BLESSING OF WATER:**

- Come up to the bowl of water. Bow before it, put your hand in it, make the sign of the cross and let water bless you.

**CLOSING HYMN:** choose a hymn to end your prayer.

<sup>28</sup> World Council of Churches Prayer Services.

14. In the developed world it takes on average 15,000 litres of water per year to remove the human waste of each person. (35 kilos of excrement and 500 litres of urine).<sup>12</sup>

### Bottled Water:

- 15 “Approximately 25% of bottled water is merely tap water and according to tests carried out in the USA by the Natural Resources Defence Council (NRDC) it violated, in at least one sample, an enforceable standard or exceeded microbiological-purity guidelines.”<sup>13</sup>
16. The water bottling industry profits from the sale of this common resource at the expense of the environment. Pumping can dry out springs, destroy habitats, devastate ecosystems, and drain aquifers. Plastics are now the fastest growing sector of the waste stream and presently take up more than 25% of the volume of materials sent to landfills every year.<sup>14</sup>
17. The Perrier group owned by Nestle is twice as big as the next largest water-bottling corporation. Nestle owns approximately 30% of the bottled water market. Danone controls 15% of the market, with Pepsi and Coca-Cola as runner-ups. The bottled water industry is currently worth \$22 billion and some experts estimate a growth potential of 30% annually”.<sup>15</sup>

### PRIVATISATION OF WATER – “A BIG ISSUE!” WATER AND MULTINATIONALS

Predictions are that by the year 2025 two-thirds of the world population will not have access to sufficient drinking water. Many multinational corporations see this “crisis” for humanity as an economic opportunity. Fortune Magazine, May 2000 stated: “Water promises to be to the 21<sup>st</sup> century what oil was to the 20<sup>th</sup> century: the precious commodity that determines the wealth of nations.” However, unlike oil, water has no substitute!

For most people water is not thought of as a “commodity” to be bought and sold. Water has always been considered as being a “public trust” because water is

<sup>12</sup> New Internationalist Magazine, March 2003

<sup>13</sup> Water for All Campaign, Public Citizen ([www.citizen.org/cmen/water](http://www.citizen.org/cmen/water))

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

- Learn from communities who have successfully resolved problems relating to water.
- Find out who owns the companies of bottled water sold where you live.

#### CONSERVE

- Think of some ways you can conserve water in your home. E.g., fix leaky faucets/taps, limit lawn watering and long showers and support alternative methods of sewage management (dry sanitation).
- Revive water harvesting techniques (traditional knowledge and practices), protect the watershed by encouraging forestry programmes and campaigns to plant trees.
- Build awareness concerning the importance of healthy grasslands, farm lands, wetlands and woodlands; it is the best insurance against water scarcity.

#### DEFEND

- The rights of local communities to manage their water resources. Question critically the liberalization and commercialisation of services for water and sanitation.
- **Advocacy at local, national and international levels.**<sup>27</sup> i) Find out how water is managed in your country, region or town; ii) Find out what the water and sanitation policy is in your local area and in your country. Pay particular attention to what your government position is on the **GATS negotiations**; iii) consult reputable NGOs or other experts for this information and; iv) work with them to defend basic rights to water and sanitation.
- **Advocacy in developed countries:** target the national Ministers for Trade and the European Commission for Trade to defend in clear language at the **GATS negotiations** the exclusion of the access to household water and basic sanitation services from the renegotiated GATS agreement.
- Limit the use of lawn fertilizers, and be sure to use only phosphorus-free fertilizers. Most lawns already have all the phosphorus they need.

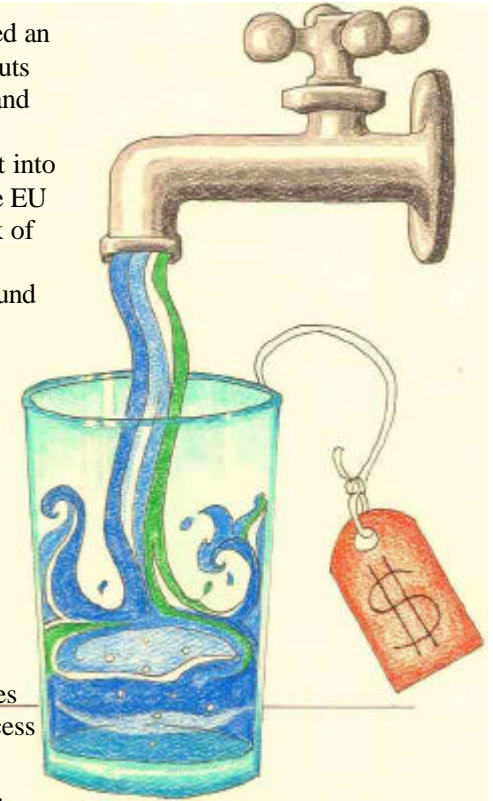
#### CHANGE

- Become an educated consumer! Buy recycled, environmentally friendly products.
- **Personal Conversion:** Choose one activity you can personally commit yourself to do and another with your community. Evaluate this at some future date.

review of IMF loans in 40 countries during 2000 revealed that 12 countries had loan conditions that imposed water privatization. In general, it is African countries, the smallest, most impoverished, and most debt-ridden countries that experience these conditions. More than 5 million people die each year in Africa from poor water access.”<sup>19</sup>

Recently, the Dutch Financial Daily carried an article stating that “the European Union puts developing countries under pressure to hand over their water supply to European Companies”. The article provides insight into which sectors in other WTO countries the EU wants market access to, in the framework of GATS and the relevant forthcoming negotiations under the so-called Doha Round of WTO. European drinking water corporations like Suez<sup>20</sup>, Vivendi, and Thames Water have an interest in the dismantling of public drinking water supplies in the developing world.<sup>21</sup>

What is happening is that legal agreements, under the WTO, guarantee the free and unregulated flow of goods, services, and capital across national borders. Governments are signing away their control over domestic water supplies for debt relief, the promise of market access and for foreign aid. Citizens are then obliged to purchase water at a high price.



As these institutions (WTO, IMF) take on more and more of the economic and social policy decision making function of the nation state, the question must be asked, where does society draw the line between what goods and services are to be protected because they are deemed critical for life, critical for a man, woman, or child’s ability to live a dignified life versus the imperative of business to maximize profit?

<sup>27</sup> AEFJN document on water. c.f. <http://www.aefin.org/>

<sup>19</sup> Global Water Grab pamphlet by Polaris Institute ([www.polarisinstitute.org](http://www.polarisinstitute.org))

locally and internationally to protect the planet's precious water and to protect the right of all to access to water. In the current crisis we need to ally ourselves with those who have no water or are under threat, and with others who are fighting for justice among people and for the preservation of this precious resource.

**This is the challenge for today:**

- ❖ The prophetic dimension of religious life calls us to a lifestyle of simplicity and reverence for all creation.
- ❖ Many religious are involved in water issues because they work with communities that do not have access to fresh water!
- ❖ We are people who can read the 'signs of the times'.
- ❖ We are called to be in a continuous process of discernment.
- ❖ We have resources and established networks and ways to communicate the message and the warning of this threat to life.
- ❖ We have, through our spiritualities and charisms, a commitment to reconciliation and restoring harmony.
- ❖ 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.

How we respond will depend on where we live. For those who live in societies and countries characterized by consumerism and materialistic values, ways to live in harmony with creation will differ from those who live in societies and countries where the basic essentials to live a dignified human life hardly exist.

due time, the rivers continue to flow towards the sea, irrigating the land..." (cf. Jeremiah 31, 35-37; 33, 19-26).

Water is good for purifying, for quenching thirst, irrigating plants, swimming, for refreshing, preparing food, and many other purposes. *It is impossible to live without water.*

The Samaritan woman drew water from the well to quench her thirst every day. Speaking with Jesus, she discovered another spring, within herself, gushing with eternal life (Jn 4,14). "Happy the person who... finds pleasure in the Law of the Lord and murmurs God's law day and night. That person is like a tree that is planted by water streams, yielding its fruit in season, its leaves never fading, success attends all they do." (Ps 1)

**Scripture Resources:** Some texts that speak about water, and their symbolism:

- John 7, 37-39, the promise of living water.
- John 4,7-14, the water of life in the conversation with the Samaritan woman.
- Ezekiel 47, 1-12, the beautiful vision of water that flows from the temple irrigating everything.
- Apocalypse 7,17, the lamb that leads by springs of living water.
- Apocalypse, 22,2, the river that flows from the New Paradise generating life in all parts.
- Genesis 2,10-13, the river of terrestrial Paradise that generates the 4 great rivers of the world.
- Psalm 107, 23-30, God calms the tempests of the waters of the sea (cf. Mk 4, 35-41).

**THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION** <sup>23</sup>

Water is a primordial reality whose importance and symbolism touches every level of existence. Ancient myth and modern science converge when they see water as the cradle of life, the amniotic fluid that holds the embryo of evolution and growth. As the basic constituent of all organic material, water is necessary for the existence of all living things, human, animal and plant. Its presence assures life and growth; its absence presages death and decay.

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<sup>23</sup> Mons. Liam Bergin, Rector of the Irish College, Rome.

- "For water users living in poverty ...(it is) *a right to life issue.*"
- "*The few*, with the means to control, cannot destroy or exhaust this resource, which is destined for the use of all. *Powerful international interests*, public and private, *must adapt their agendas to serve human needs rather than dominate them.*"

## QUESTIONS FOR THE "JUDGE" SECTION

1. Describe in (a few words) a sentence what you think the position of the Church is with regard to water?
2. How does this compare with the market ethic of supply and demand?
3. What is the most recent church statement (local or international), or comment, you can remember with regard to the environment in general and to water in particular? What reaction did it elicit in your community?
4. Have any of your recent Congregational Chapters made statements on the Integrity of Creation?

Access and deprivation underlie most water decisions. Hence linkages between water policy and ethics increasingly emerge throughout the world."<sup>24</sup>

In the Judeo-Christian tradition the rich symbolism of water finds a wonderful summary in the "Prayer over Baptismal Waters" in the Rite of Baptism. At the very dawn of creation the Spirit of God breathed on the waters making them the source of all goodness. The waters of the great flood were a sign of the waters of baptism, prefiguring the life to come, an end to sin and a new beginning for all creation. Through the waters of the Red Sea the Lord led Israel out of Egypt. In the waters of baptism the new People of God is freed from the slavery of sin. Through the Jordan River, the Lord brought his chosen ones into the land of Canaan to live in integrity and peace. Through the waters of baptism, God's pilgrim people enter the promised land where justice and harmony prevail. The prophets announced a future cleansing which would create a new heart and bestow a new spirit. John the Baptist preached a baptism for the forgiveness of sins and dramatically prefigured the dawn of redemption with his rite of washing.

In fulfilment of his baptism, Jesus died on the cross and, as water and blood flowed from his side, he opened for us the way to salvation.

Baptism is not a rite of passage into a privileged club. It is primarily a commitment to live in the service of our sisters and brothers and to manifest the justice of our God and Father as Jesus did. It is the sacrament by which believers express their commitment to live as the Spirit-filled community that seeks to anticipate the fullness of life that God holds in store for all creation.

<sup>24</sup> "Water, An Essential Element for Life," for the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Water Forum (Kyoto, 16<sup>th</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> March 2003). For copies of the text in several languages go to: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/index.htm](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/index.htm)