



Connecting peace, ecology and justice from the Gospel perspective

The Year of Faith and the International Year of Water Co-operation MARCH 2013

Co-ordinator's Comments

"We forget that the water cycle and the life cycle are one." Jacques Cousteau

In our dominant globalised economic system, water has been turned into a commodity to be traded by the powerful. The result is environmental destruction, oppression of peoples and conflict. We forget that the man-made economic system depends on critical natural systems.

The impact of the recent floods in Queensland on water supply, sewerage and food alone is a reminder of the need to be more aware of the importance of water in the whole complex system. What happened there affected people both locally and globally. This year the Church is focussing on Faith. The UN General Assembly is focussing on Water Co-operation. They are connected. Discipleship of Jesus is about life. "I came that they might have life and have it to the full." John 10:10.

Increased pressure on access to clean water is a global issue and co-operation is essential to deal with it. So this year Columban Connections will connect with these themes. This issue includes issues associated with rivers.

Anne Lanyon

What We've Been Up To: Video resources "Jeju – Untold Story"

We continue to support the efforts of Columban, Fr Pat Cunningham in the struggle by the people of Gangjeong against the construction of a marine base on Jeju in South Korea. View a promo of "Jeju-Untold Story". <http://savejejunow.org/fundraising-campaign-for-the-making-a-film-on-the-struggle-against-the-jeju-naval-base-fwd/>

Linking Religion and Ecology

How can science and faith enhance each other?

Fr Sean McDonagh has set up an MA course in

Religion and Ecology at All Hallows College, Dublin City University. Part of the course involves a week in The Burren National Park, special because of its limestone geological formation and resultant vegetation. We have prepared a set of video interviews we did of Columban representatives from around the globe and Irish post graduate students who participated in the week. See www.columban.org.au/our-works/peace-ecology-justice/resources/

Faith in Mining Forum

Talks from the FEN Interfaith Forum held on 14th October are available on <http://faithecology.net.au/media/>

Catholic Social Teaching

There has always been a tendency on the part of many of us Christians to seek to 'spiritualize' those parts of the Gospel that don't sit too comfortably with us. It is nothing more than rationalizing when we turn the call to universal justice into something less concrete. There is a spiritual sense to hunger and thirst but that is addressed elsewhere. Matthew 25, as an example, offers no such mandate nor does the Church intend this in its social teachings. What is intended is a change of heart and lifestyle by each of us.

The social encyclicals, from Leo XIII through to Benedict XVI, re-iterate that clean water, among other necessities, will come to everyone on the planet when we who live in surplus accept that this is not right while others lack what is needed for a healthy and dignified life.

As God intended, created goods should flow fairly to all. All other rights, whatever they may be, are subordinated to this principle. (See *Popularum Progressio* 22; *Gaudium et Spes* 69)

Jack Evans



Water for Life

The Parkari Kohlis are a low caste Hindu Tribal People, classed as untouchables, whose homeland is in the SE of Pakistan. They live in the Thar Parkar Desert whose centre is the small town of Nagar Parkar. Thar Parkar is Pakistan's largest district of nearly 20,000 square km and about 2,350 villages. It is extremely poor.

Many Parkari Kohlis own land in Nagar Parker but due to insufficient water supply a viable living is difficult. Women there, as elsewhere, collect the water. When it is scarce they travel longer distances to collect it from tube-wells

Despite heavy flooding in recent years there are intense water shortages in parts of the country. Pakistan needs to promote the proper conservation and management of water. It needs to implement workable rainwater collecting facilities at the village level so as to reach as many people as possible and alleviate some of their difficulties.

One modest effort by the Catholic Church is the construction of water tanks. They are built underground with a large concrete area on top to catch the monsoon rains. When the monsoon rain water is used up, it can be refilled in bulk by drawing water from distant wells. This work is done by men on oxen, camel or donkey and cart. It saves the women from having to fetch water daily.

Water filters are also provided. They are made from



the traditional clay pots that people use for drawing and storing water. They work effectively and are an example of simple technology appropriate to the peoples' needs and context. The new water storage facilities have transformed the lives of people. They have a safe source of clean water and diseases have diminished. It gives more opportunity for children to go to school and women have more time to spend on other activities, and maybe have a little rest!

Tomas King, Pakistan. For more information contact Fr Tomas at tconraoi@gmail.com

Water Ownership

In Australia we have seen clashes between irrigators, farmers and environmentalists over the Murray-Darling river water because of "ownership".

In New Zealand I monitor and take an interest in water issues in dialogue with a number of people who are in close contact with current justice, environment and indigenous issues. Lately the concern has been with fresh water questions in connection with water ownership. The issue arises in debate with Maori groups contending the government's position on asset sales, especially dams on river systems. There is a higher level of concern and some negativity about the state of local lowland streams. An increasing amount of blame is being placed on farming for damage to freshwaters. **Michael Gormley, JPIC Coordinator**

Cooperation on Water Issues Builds Peace

The UN General Assembly sees water cooperation as a vehicle for peace and sustainable development. Cultural, scientific, educational, religious, economic, political, legal, social and institutional dimensions can be brought to bear on the following key messages: Water co-operation

- is key to poverty eradication, social equity and gender equality,
- creates economic benefits,
- is crucial to preserving water resources and protecting the environment,
- builds peace.

March 22nd is **World Water Day**. Do something practical in your parish, school, community. See www.un/water.org/watercooperation2013

Active Non-Violence

Feb 15th was the 10th Anniversary of the biggest global peace protest in history. We need to continue to practise non-violent responses to abusive power. See www.youtube.com/watch?v=fMnPCaUIXIM

Water, Land and Rivers

Water is the fluid of birth as every mother knows. It is the fundamental element used to celebrate Baptismal entry into Christ's community. By its nature, the element of water carries multiple levels of meaning. Children need constant sips of water. We die if the body is denied water for even a few days. The body is 66% water. Our animal nature is made of water as well as stardust.

Water features strongly in Australian stories – droughts and flooding rains, river banks and ocean shores. White explorers searched for well-watered land and pioneer settlers quickly followed their discoveries. Fortunes were made from cropping grain and on the sheep's back. A sad part of these stories is that Aboriginal peoples faded from country as they lost access to well watered hunting grounds and their drinking holes were poisoned.

Using water images is rooted in Scriptural teaching:

- Paradise was a well-watered garden;
- Human Pride led to the Deluge;
- The Jews in exile wept by the rivers of Babylon;
- Jesus was baptised in the Jordan;
- Blood and Water flowed from the side of Jesus;
- Four Rivers of blessing flowed from the Heavenly Jerusalem.
- Even Iarrikin Australian poets played on the religious meanings of water to make us smile – 'more evils are wrought by water than by the drink'.

Australia must plan to use its water resources wisely. The ecological health of our rivers is what underpins the life of inland communities. How the Murray Darling Plan (MDP) is developed and implemented is a concern for people of religion and not just the preserve of business, banks and water traders. Faith-based responsibility to honour the Creator God involves us in creating a wise MDP.

Social justice means wise management of the biological life of waterways, the basis of life for agriculture and town communities. It looks underground to care for aquifers. These are under threat from over-extraction by mining operations and from pollution by coal seam gas extraction methods.

Our faith-based concern about water looks beyond personal fence lines. Examples are many:

- Preserve wild rivers as naturally functioning bio-systems;

- Quickly relocate housing and factories built on flood plains or levy bank them for ever increasing flood levels;
- Preserve fertile and well watered agricultural land from city sprawl;
- Regulate architects to design more water efficient homes and gardens;
- Vocally support scientific research into adapting crops to a changing climate; eat less meat. (Cows bred for their meat need up to 140 litres of water a day).

Many Caritas aid projects focus on providing clean water supplies such as simple pumps and village wells. Most children in developing countries die of water borne disease. Women too have little time for education if they have to carry water from a distance. Water is a blessing of God, created essential to all life.

For facts and projects see:

- Sydney Water, sydneywater.com.au
- Murray Darling Plan (MDP), mdpa.gov.au
- Bureau Meteorology, bom.gov.au
- Climate Commission, climatecommission.gov.au
- UNESCO water and religions, unesco.org/water/news/newsletter/

Climate Change and Water in Australia

www.cana.net.au/water/index.html

Save Water

www.savewater.com.au

Charles Rue



What Price “Ecosystem Services”?

Strong influences on Governments and the UN are arguing that the intrinsic value of nature should have a commercial value. Using the term “Ecosystem Services”, they are convincing leaders that putting a price on natural systems will ensure that they will be better valued.

Pavan Sukhdev, a banker who was a Special Adviser, Head of UNEP’s Green Economy Initiative, and lead author of their report “Towards a Green Economy” (TEEB) writes, “Why it makes good business sense for ending the economic invisibility of nature and recognising the value of biodiversity and ecosystem services”.

<http://pavansukhdev.com/articles/>

These are the kind of talks that are going on at the G8 level. Others like George Monbiot criticize the UK Government which now has committees seeking to put a price on nature and then to create a market.

“Payments for ‘ecosystem services’ look like the prelude to the greatest privatisation since enclosure”, he says. (See “Putting a price on the rivers and rain diminishes us all.” www.guardian.co.uk Aug 6th 2012).

Developments such as this highlight a distortion of values. The recent approval of mining projects at Maules Creek near Gunnedah, and the Dendrobium mine near Avon Dam in NSW will affect creek and river systems and possibly Sydney’s water supply. We humans are responsible before God for the well-being of river systems. Let’s support all those who are actively working to protect them.

Water as a Human Right and a Common Good by César Correa Valenzuela, JPIC Coordinator, Chile

The Columbans in Chile are very involved in water issues. For us as Christians the main course of our action is to raise awareness of water as something bigger than a resource – it has sociological, biological, symbolic and religious meanings in all cultures and for all Peoples. We are involved in a co-ordinated effort against the building of 5 dams (the Hydro Aysén Project) which will flood pristine wilderness in Patagonia.



Bishop Infanti de la Mora has also been one of the leaders. He published a pastoral letter **“Give us this day our daily water”**. From the introduction: *While visiting the community of Villa O’Higgins, my car got thirsty. Quenching that thirst cost me 850 pesos per liter of gasoline (\$5.25/gallon). I was also thirsty. It cost me 900 pesos per liter of WATER (\$5.55/gallon). I did not stay calm. In the kingdom of pure and crystalline waters, of eternal snows, of graceful waterfalls, and majestic rivers such as Aysén where one can get the purest water on the planet for free, bottled water is more expensive than gasoline, milk, or a kilo of bread. And, like fireworks going off, questions filled my mind. And so I went searching, asking, observing, thinking and talking to people,...*

Through the subject of water, I have discovered how deeply social, ethical, political, religious, cultural and economic interests and motives are intertwined. I have been able to understand the direction our human history is taking, the political economy of a globalized world, the vocation and mission of the human being on this earth, and the urgent and prophetic role of the Christian and the responsibility to be an instrument of God to fight and build a world of harmony, peace, justice, solidarity and equality. In a media article Bishop Infanti said, “In Aysén, 96% of the fresh-water rights are in the hands of one single company (Endesa).

That creates serious problems: not just because it’s a monopoly, but because controlling the water – which is a scarce resource that’s so vital to humans – can become a form of colonialism, the domination of certain peoples.” See <http://www.ecosistemas.cl/1776/printer-83669.html>

Pipe Dreams

This important report into the impact of the part-Australian Government financed LNG project in Papua New Guinea was launched in December. It concludes that the local people will be the last to reap any economic benefits and the first to suffer from damage to rivers.

www.jubileeaustralia.org

Jubilee Sunday is May 19th.

Support the Stop Debt Vultures Campaign.

Anne Lanyon