2014

Just Water: A Feminist Catholic Response to the Commodification of Water

Rachel Noelle Hart Winter
Loyola University Chicago

LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

JUST WATER

A FEMINIST CATHOLIC RESPONSE TO THE COMMODIFICATION OF WATER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN THEOLOGY

BY

RACHEL HART WINTER

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

MAY 2014

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has taught me the value of good mentors, friends, and family. It is those people I wish to thank and acknowledge here. My director, Dr. Susan Ross, has been an excellent guide. Her insights and knowledge into issues surrounding feminist theological ethics have shaped my own discoveries. Her feedback and overall support of this project were constant sources of inspiration. The wisdom she shared through coursework, comprehensive exams, and this project has helped me solidify my commitment to women's issues and theology. Dr. Tisha Rajendra has helped me to find my voice as a scholar, offering helpful ideas around both content and style. Her expertise and excitement about my project has helped at critical points in the process of writing. The time and commitment she made to this project, especially in the final stages sustained my own work and helped bring this dissertation to completion. Finally, Dr. William French has guided my work. His knowledge in all things ecological has been invaluable. I am grateful for the numerous meetings, emails, and conversations that have given life to these ideas and encouraged me along the way.

Loyola University Chicago has been a wonderful home for the last nine years. I am grateful to the many professors in the Theology Department who have shaped who I am. I am grateful to Dr. Wendy Cotter who helped me at a crucial moment in this project find the strength to keep moving forward. The work of both Catherine Wolf and

Marianne Wolfe has enabled me to continually navigate the many systems at Loyola University Chicago. Their day-to-day support of students like myself keeps us all on track. Whether printing out a missing exam or helping to connect yet another computer to a printer, their ability to support and encourage my work has been a gift.

I am grateful to the friends who have provided much needed feedback at times and humor at others. Sharing the joys of the classroom, the challenges of exams, and the delicate process of writing a dissertation with friends has been one of the most memorable parts of my time at Loyola. Companions such as Elisabeth, Jeanine, Andrea, Erin, Caroline, Mary, Tom, Laura, Ryan, Ann Marie, Bridget, Nicole, Tom J., Radhika, Neva, Kimberly, Megan, Shannon, Brett, and Chris have helped me get where I am today. I also wish to thank Claire Noonan and Dominican University for providing the time and space needed to complete this project. Surrounding myself with a wonderful set of colleagues in the Mission and Ministry Division there has fueled the final synthesis that lies within these pages. Thank you to my community at Dominican and at Loyola for constantly nourishing my scholarship and commitment to justice in our world today.

Words do not seem to capture the thanks owed to my family. My parents, Betsy and Joe, have stood by me each step of the way. Constantly offering support, encouragement, and perspective during the ups and downs of the last few years, my parents were a vital source of strength; my gratitude for them is without measure. My siblings, Justin, Brendan, and Megan, have helped with everything from editing to offering needed distractions at times. Justin has read each draft, sent gifts of encouragement and humor, and constantly reminded me that I would finish. Each of my siblings has helped me arrive at the place I am today. Anna Gray, Alanna, and Taylor

have been great sources of encouragement and support along the way. Carol Lynn and Mark Winter have also provided constant encouragement and helped fuel my passion through their commitment to Living Water International.

Finally, I owe the greatest thanks to my husband, Patrick. Without his help, I would not have finished this project. It is his vision that has helped make this a reality. His support of every kind provided the space and time I needed to complete this dissertation. It is his love and encouragement that kept me going. I imagine our children, Joseph and Thomas, living in a world that embraces ecological justice, and that thought gives me great hope.

For
Patrick,
my partner and companion on this journey,
and for our children:
Joseph and Thomas

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Any Catholic ecological ethic today that does not focus sustained attention to our worldwide water crisis is inadequate, for it fails to engage one of today's core social justice violations and neglects to offer any moral guidance for one of the human family's most pressing challenges. A responsible Catholic approach to water justice that addresses the problems stemming from a commodified view of water must be informed by ecofeminist concerns and by the Catholic social justice tradition of moral reasoning. As populations grow and water sources run dry, access to water has become a pressing ethical issue. Today, nearly one billion people, almost one-sixth of the world's population, struggle to survive without access to clean water, while millions more are affected indirectly. It is crucial to articulate an adequate value system for water, which affirms water as more than another commodity and safeguards 'just water' for all.

First, I describe the commodifed view of water that leads to pollution, diversion, and privatization of water. Second, I present an alternate view of water articulated in the narratives of Genesis and Psalms. Third, I use tools from within the Catholic tradition to create a set of guidelines for protecting water. Finally, I turn to ecofeminism, to address the undue burden women face in light of water challenges. Taking seriously both human rights and the responsibility to protect all of God's creation provides new solutions based on a Catholic, ecofeminist perspective on justice.

INTRODUCTION

> Be praised my God for Sister Water, who is useful, humble, precious and pure.[1]
>
> Water, water, everywhere, nor any drop to drink.[2]

Water touches every aspect of our lives. Roughly seventy percent of both our bodies and the surface of our planet are comprised of water. We begin our lives in the womb surrounded by water and our lives come to an end when we lack water. It is the life-blood of our ecosystem that supports the survival of both humans and non-humans alike. Water forms the very basis of life, embracing all things and existing in all things.[3] Numerous religions use water as a symbol of the sacred pointing to cleansing, freedom and new life. As populations grow and water sources run dry, access to water has become a pressing ethical issue that requires immediate attention from scholars and activists of every stripe. One such response to the crisis that includes the scarcity of water has been to turn water into a commodity, arguing that human ingenuity might be able to fix the

[1] Eric Doyle, "The Canticle of Brother Sun and the Value of Creation" in *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader,* ed. by Dawn M. Nothwehr, OSF. (Ouincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002).

[2] Samuel Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

[3] Theodor Schwenk and Wolfram Schwenk, *Water: The Element of Life* (New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc, 1989), 5.

problem.[4] Water as a commodity becomes another product of a worldview that claims everything is for sale. This commodious view of water has led to more injustices around water as this project addresses.

In 1224 Francis of Assisi described water as "useful, humble, precious and pure." In the year 2014, the state of water has taken a radically different turn: many people struggle to find pure, clean water; yet others with easy access do not appreciate the true value of water and often use it in wasteful ways. Samuel Coleridge wrote in 1797 that "water, water" was "everywhere" but there was not "a drop to drink," prophetic words for our situation today. Water certainly exists in abundance; however, drops of water that are clean and safe for drinking are becoming more difficult to find for one billion humans, mostly those living in the developing world. Human beings have allowed the market to commodify water, thus determining a profit-based value that rips water from its natural context as an essential requirement for the common good of both human beings and ecosystems.

These one billion people, about one-sixth of the world's population, struggle to survive without access to clean water, while millions more are affected indirectly.[5] Given human population growth trends, it is predicted that within twenty years humans will use

---

[4] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1988), 179-217.

[5] "Water Sanitation and Health," World Health Organization, accessed December 3, 2012, http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/mdg1/en/index.html.

forty percent more water than we do currently.[6] Lack of clean water, leading to poor sanitation and hygiene, causes more than eighty percent of all diseases in the world.[7] Over 2.5 billion people live without adequate sanitation.[8] In Latin America and the Caribbean eighty percent of illnesses and two-thirds of all deaths are attributed to contaminated water.[9] These staggering numbers will only worsen as clean water sources are diminished and the demand for safe water grows. This is arguably the greatest "ecological-humanitarian crisis" that must "lay claim to the collective Christian conscience" since it is one of the most pressing issues we face.[10]

Scientists have recommended concrete steps to increase water security; but now is the time for theologians and ethicists to take these steps and to frame them in a religious and moral context. Despite agreement over the human impact on the environment, there is little consensus on an adequate response to minimize the destruction.[11] Theologians

---

[6] UNEP, 2011, *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication,*
www.unep.org/greeneconomy, *see* Water Chapter, accessed December 5, 2012,
http://www.unep.org/pdf/water/WAT-Water_KB_17.08_PRINT_EDITION.2011.pdf

[7] UNESCO.

[8] UNEP, 2011, *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication,*
www.unep.org/greeneconomy.

[9] Claire Foster, *Sharing God's Planet: A Christian Vision for a Sustainable Future* (London: Church House Publishing, 2005), 9.

[10] Mark J. Allman, "Theology H2O: The World Water Crisis and Sacramental Imagination" in *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2001), 403.

[11] Cathy Mabry McMullen, "The Signs of the Times: The State of the Question among Ecologists" in *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment (*Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2001), 24.

can offer a response which "reads the signs of the times" while remaining rooted in a tradition that has shaped people's belief systems for centuries. In order to decrease the suffering experienced by all those affected by the water crisis, it is the responsibility of theologians and ethicists to inform people of the reality and gravity of this issue so that Christians can address this human rights and ecological tragedy not only in their churches but also through their political voice exercised at the polls. Only in this way will societies value water for its intrinsic worth, instead of valuing water as a commodity that can reap massive monetary profits at the expense of both marginalized people and ecosystems. Although Christian ethics is a humble force in this necessary change, its power lies in its rooting of action in religious and moral convictions. My project urges Christians to broaden their definition of justice to include the interconnectedness of ecological issues, our relationships with one another, and our covenant with God.

Personal Experience

On a hot August day I arrived in the Marshall Islands. The average temperature was eighty degrees, there was minimal shade, and the electricity was inconsistent, which made fans unreliable. Water seemed like the best option to stay cool and hydrated. Upon turning on the tap in my new home, orange and brown water trickled out. This was not drinkable water, although many Islanders were forced to drink it. As volunteers, we lived in a home with an expensive and highly sophisticated water filtration system. This was the first of many moments when I recognized the vast difference between my privileged lifestyle and that of the Islanders. This experience has remained with me, propelling both my academic and professional journey.

As a Jesuit volunteer in the Marshall Islands, I remember being offered water filled with insect larvae and not knowing what to do. This moment has never left me. And I have experienced it moments like this not only in the Marshall Islands, but also in Kenya, Ecuador, and elsewhere. Why do the economically poor have to drink water like this? Why did almost half of my students in the Islands miss class each week due to water-borne illnesses? This is a grave injustice, and the commodification of water exacerbates the problem of the poor's access to clean water.

As a result of the experiences, I have come to a greater awareness of both the preciousness of this resource and the problems that result from viewing water as only a commodity. I have seen water wasted and underappreciated in our context here in America. In the past months in Rogers Park, a neighborhood in Chicago, I have watched water flow from a fire hydrant which appeared to go unnoticed by city officials. I have seen grass watered to the point of flooding, and I have watched the garbage cans overflow with relatively expensive empty water bottles that once contained water that is no cleaner than that of the city tap. Juxtaposing my experience in the Marshall Islands with Chicago's irresponsible use of water has propelled my research on a path to articulate a better value system for water.

This project is the culmination of over ten years of experiences, course work and research since that day when I arrived in the Marshall Islands in August of 2000. It is my hope that in the future no one will have to drink unclean water. The first step in a just theological response toward this goal is to acknowledge the lived experience of both unjust access to water and human wastefulness, two realities resulting from the

commodification of this precious resource.

Overview

Scientists and anthropologists contribute a great deal to the debate on water usage and how one might better understand water. However, scientists do not often address values. How we value water, and other human beings, flows from a worldview which can be informed by Christian ethics. The ancient authors inspired to write the biblical creation and flood stories understood the paradoxical power of water to destroy and to bring new life. Sadly, we have lost this awareness throughout our insistence on irresponsible consumption and commodification of water. Theologians construct worldviews, connecting an understanding of God with how we organize reality. It is for this reason that I argue theology is a necessary discipline in orienting society toward a new water ethic. The current paradigm operative and partly responsible for the water crisis reduces water to the status of a commodity. As such, water is privatized and sold for profit; water is polluted without regard for the other species and future generations that rely on this resource; and as a result the most vulnerable people, whom this crisis disproportionately affects, are dehumanized.

Based on the significance of water in both story and ritual, theologians can draw on rich resources when shaping an alternative to the commodification of water. The prominence of water in scripture is hard to miss. In the Jahwist creation account in Genesis, water springs forth from the Garden of Eden. In the story of the flood, water brings death to the wickedness in human hearts and offers cleansing and a second chance through Noah. In Exodus, the journey of the once enslaved Hebrews from oppression to

liberation passes through the waters of the Red Sea. Joshua leads the wandering Israelites across the Jordan River into the promised land. The Psalms celebrate water as a source of God's blessing, while acknowledging water's destructiveness. Throughout Scripture (particularly in the Genesis creation stories and in the Psalms), water plays a central role in creation, cleansing, and liberation. The biblical appreciation of water's potential both to destroy and to give life reminds humanity of its humble place as a part of the larger cosmic whole of creation.

Catholic social teaching contains a rich set of principles and guidelines which are also helpful in critiquing the commodification of water. In particular the common good serves as a point of reference when arguing for water as a human right, which must be protected for all. Furthermore, I show that the common good can be expanded to respond to the planetary reality that affirms the intrinsic value of water for Earth.

Ecofeminism is the final resource I engage in rounding out my critique of the narrow focus sustained in the commodity view for water. Ecofeminists present themes which help to shift the value for water as a resource which must be protected for all species and safeguarded for the ecosystems which support life on Earth. I rely on the contextual methodology found within ecofeminism to discuss the injustice millions of women experience surrounding access to water. It is in connecting ecofeminist claims with the biblical theology of water and the common good that I present an alternate view of water.

This commodification worldview does not account for the interdependence of all parts of creation; consequently, such a worldview ignores the universal right to water for

human communities and for the ecosystems upon which they rely. A new ethic is needed to usher in a view of water that honors the nature of this resource as a necessary component of the cosmic common good. This new ethic must state that water is more than an economic commodity; but rather the life blood of the earth and the most essential element to support all forms of life on this earth.

In Chapter One, I argue that the commodification of water creates a great injustice to marginalized peoples and the ecosystems of the earth. This chapter seeks both to define commodification and to detail its effects not only on the human community, but also on ecosystems. The view that sees water as a commodity encourages what I detail as unjust practices toward water. Christian ethics is a value system that can help frame a new value for water that places water within a larger context that just the market economy. Finally, I argue that viewing water as only a commodity is an inadequate approach to water since it leads to harmful practices which further harm the earth and marginalized populations.

In Chapter Two, I extract a biblical view of water based on the Genesis creation accounts and a sampling of texts from the Psalms. The biblical authors inspired to write the accounts of creation, floods, and droughts understood the paradoxical power of water to destroy and to bring new life. Water is transient, a powerful and awe-inspiring part of God's earth, not something that should be owned or re-directed by human technology without grave consequences. The creation stories in Genesis and various texts from the Psalms affirm this view of water as that which sustains, destroys, and blesses life. These texts honor the power of water and remind the human community of its interdependence

with the cosmic whole of creation. A just water theory requires a paradigm shift from a focus on commodification for profit to an acknowledgment of the real value of water based on the interdependence of all of the parts of God's creation.

In Chapter Three, I argue that the Catholic social teaching tradition can provide the groundwork for an approach to water that prioritizes the needs of humans and ecosystems over the profit and consumer-driven mindset of the market system. In particular, I highlight the principle of the common good. I challenge the traditional use of this principle, refocusing the common good to account for a cosmocentric worldview instead of the anthropocentric mindset that has dominated the tradition's understanding of the common good. In this chapter, I broaden the original meaning of the common good and employ this "planetary common good" to address the ecological and social injustice of the commodification of water.

In Chapter Four, I point to ecofeminism as an apt corrective for the narrow anthropocentrism of the Catholic notion of the common good. Ecofeminism presents a cosmocentric view of the world which properly elevates the significance of ecosystems. Ecofeminism also highlights one of the unjust effects of the commodification of water: the disproportionate harm done to both women and nature. I address the way ecofeminism contributes a more accurate account of the interdependent relationship between humanity and the rest of creation. I argue that drawing on the strengths of ecofeminism can "ecologize" the common good and thus provide the underpinnings for a just water theory that responds to the commodification of water so prevalent today.

Any Catholic ethic today that does not focus sustained attention to our world-wide

water crisis is inadequate, for it fails to engage one of today's core socio-ecological justice violations. A Catholic response to the injustices of water commodification should 1) take root in the biblical appreciation for humanity's humble place within a larger cosmic context, 2) be animated by the Catholic social justice tradition of moral reasoning, and 3) be expanded by the cosmocentric focus of ecofeminism. Justice prevails when we increase access to clean water and sanitation for all while fulfilling our responsibility to care for God's creation by rejecting the commodification of water and the ecosystems that need it.

CHAPTER ONE

IS WATER FOR SALE?

> By its very nature, water cannot be treated as just another commodity among many, and it must be used rationally and in solidarity with others. The distribution of water is traditionally among the responsibilities that fall to public agencies [government], since water is considered a public good. If water distribution is entrusted to the private sector, it should still be considered a public good. The right to water, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as merely an economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore, the right to safe drinking water is an universal and inalienable right.[1]

The 2008 documentary film *Flow*: *For Love of Water* follows a story about the commodification of water in Mecosta County, Michigan. In 2000 the Nestle Corporation created a bottling facility for water and began pumping water from the region to sell on the market. Citizens there noticed that water levels were diminishing and rivers and creeks were drying up. As a result they took Nestle to court fighting to regain the rights to their water and the ecosystem that Nestle was endangering. Nestle ultimately won based on the fact that the water was a public good and they had a right to use it and sell it as they chose. Here, Nestle, a private corporation, took a public resource, water, and made an excessive profit, while the people in the region suffered ill-consequences. The court battle was extensive and Nestle did have to change some of its pumping procedures; however, within a short time they were back to pumping at high rates, further increasing

[1] *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (USCCB Publishing, 2004), 484-495.

the damage to streams and forests.[2] In a case like this the well-being of all the members of a community and ecosystem suffers and the powerful corporation succeeds. The irony here lies in the fact that Nestle is taking water for free, causing massive environmental ruin, while making exorbitant profits from the sale of that water.[3] Furthermore, Robert Glennon argues that a private, wealthy corporation like Nestle transferred the environmental costs to their neighbors and "to society at large."[4]

The Nestle case points to many of the problems which I argue are inherent with viewing water as a commodity. When water is valued only as an economic good, it is pumped from the ground, bottled and sold on the market. The Nestle case in Mecosta County gets to the heart of the root cause of the global water crisis: the commodification of water, a view of water which fails to appreciate water as something more that an economic good. This commodification leads to an inability to treat water "with the respect it deserves, or with the awe it deserves."[5] The problems with the use, abuse, and distribution of water today are the result of the commodification of water.

This chapter explores water, in particular water as a commodity. Water is one of

---

[2] See movie *Flow*: *For Love of Water*, and information accessed November 25, 2012, http://stopnestlewaters.org/communities/mecosta-county-mi.

[3] Nestle now owns over seventy bottled water brands across the world, see Emily Potter, "Drinking to Live: The Work of Ethically-Branded Bottled Water," in *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*, ed. Tania Lewis and Emily Potter. (London, England: Taylor and Francis, Ltd.: 2010), 124.

[4] Robert Glennon, "Bottling a Birthright," in *Whose water is it?: The Unquenchable Thirst of Water-Hungry World*, ed. Bernadette McDonald and Douglas Jehl (Washington, D.C.: National Geographoc Society: 2003), 13.

[5] Fred Powledge, *Water: The Nature, Uses, and Future of Our Most Precious and Abused Resource* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1983), 40.

the essential elements of life. Biologically, life cannot exist without water. Given the surging human population and the increasing industrialization of the planet Earth, the state of water in the world today is in great danger. Water is disproportionately distributed; thus turning it into a commodity in places where water is in short supply has become commonplace. This chapter argues that the commodification of water creates a great injustice against both marginalized peoples and the ecosystems of the earth. This chapter defines what it means to view water as a commodity, explains the effects of this approach, describes the harm done to living and non-living species, and argues that viewing water only as a commodity constitutes a tragically wrong approach to water.

I argue that the commodification of water results from a narrow view that understands water solely as an economic good. As a commodity, water is bought and sold, valued through a market mentality, and often underappreciated and wasted. Throughout this project I argue that a "wider" approach to water will encourage justice in the global response to the water crisis. Before I can critique this commodification of water, I must be clear in stating what it is and how I see it operative at present.[6] To do this, I first will explain what the commodification of water is. Second, I will examine the effects of this commodification of water, which I argue can be seen most clearly in the privatization, diversion, pollution, and bottling of water. These effects help elucidate and clarify the way I understand how the commodification of water is prevalent today. I do

[6] Alex Prud'homme argues in *The Ripple Effect: The Fate of Fresh Water in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Scribner, 2011) that in order to "forestall an emergency, we must redefine how we think of water and how we use it." Further, "we must learn to treat deceptively simple water for what it really is; the most valuable resource on earth," 360.

not intend to argue that water can never be viewed as a commodity; indeed, there are some benefits to the sale and trade of water. Rather, I argue that when water is viewed solely as a commodity without attention to the other facets of this resource, such as water's foundational value as an ecological and social resource and as a source of spiritual renewal, then there is a great risk of injustice. I also address the injustices toward marginalized people and ecosystems that I claim emerges from understanding water only as a commodity. Finally, I state why this approach to water is inadequate and the next steps I will take to establish a more just way to value water.

Water is not only a commodity and any structure that values it this way has failed to appreciate water in its greater context. Water is a human right.[7] Water is required by ecosystems to sustain life on this planet. Water is a resource that should be marked as part of the "commons" and not a good regulated by the market, because market regulation lets the rich outbid the poor. [8] While water is becoming scarce in our context due to rising human population and greater industrial needs for water, the real problem at the heart of the water crisis is the inability to value water appropriately. Gary Chamberlain argues that the scarcity at the heart of the water crisis is connected to power,

---

[7] Is water a "human need" or a "human right?" Maude Barlow argues that the difference between a "need" and a "right" in regards to water is crucial. A need can be met or supplied for in various ways; a human right, however, cannot be sold or traded. Surprisingly, the World Bank and the United Nations state that water is a "human need" and not a "human right." Barlow, "The World's Water: A Human Right or a Corporate Greed?" in *Whose Water Is It,?* 28-29.

[8] Ibid., 39.

poverty and equality and not the physical availability of water.[9] Reports have shown that the problem is one of governance, which ultimately should create equitable sharing for people and ecosystems.[10] Again, the value system for water has become a key issue in who has access to water and at what cost. Once it is commodified and priced according to the market, water becomes one of many "things" a consumer can buy. The natural world cannot "buy" water, yet the need for water in nature is equally compelling as that of human beings. Marginalized populations who live on as little as one dollar a day cannot afford to pay the market price for water when it is privatized. Thus the "power, poverty, and equality" that Chamberlain refers to can in effect be seen in the commodification of water. Vandana Shiva, a human rights activist and scholar, maintains that when the social and ecological value of a resource is recognized there is a greater chance for "equitable and sustainable use." However, seeing a resource only for its market value "creates patterns of unsustainable [sic] and inequitable use."[11] Thus valuing water as a commodity harms the planet and all living creatures on Earth.

The commodification of water is a result of viewing water only through the lens

---

[9] Chamberlain, *Troubled Waters: Religion, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008), 2; see also Steven Solomon, *Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 276. Solomon claims that in spite of scientific advances and knowledge around water, it still continues to remain the most "misgoverned, inefficiently allocated, and profligately wasted natural resource. See also Charles Fishman *The Big Thirst: The Secret Life and Turbulent Future of Water* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 18. Fishman argues similarly that many water scarcity issues actually result from poor management of water.

[10] United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), *Water: A Shared Responsibility* (executive summary of the UN World Water Development Report 2), (New York: Berghanh Books, 2006), 3.

[11] Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002), 6.

of an economic good. The problems with the use, abuse, and distribution of water today, which I argue are results of the commodification of water, stem from failing to view the value of water in its wider context. This project sets out to show that the lens one chooses to view water, whether economic, ecological, or spiritual, determines the value one ascribes to it. The market cannot account for the ecological and religious value of water. Water, I argue throughout, transcends any sort of narrow economic calculation to determine its worth. The commodification of water harms ecosystems and marginalized people and therefore alternate value systems are needed to counter the view operative in the sale, possession and distribution of water. Additionally, the free-market bias of large corporations who monetize water and privatize the profits leads to a shirking of responsibility for the externalized costs done to families and other species in the watershed. Ultimately my questions don't necessarily probe the right for Nestle, or any private corporation, to own and sell water; rather, I ask if water can be owned at all. Therefore, government regulation is needed to protect the common good.

The Commodification of Water

Society today is marked by consumerism at every turn: in the media, through the seemingly unlimited – and paralyzing – number of choices in products, and in the ability to buy just about anything. John Kavanaugh describes a human being as a "consuming self" where an individual's relevance is somehow connected to "producing, consuming, marketing, or buying."[12] This is a sweeping statement that certainly cannot account for all

[12] John Kavanaugh, *Following Christ in a Consumer Society: The Spirituality of Cultural Resistance (*Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books: 2007), 6.

humans, yet it does capture a state of personhood that is operative in a place such as America where shopping has become a national pastime of sorts. Thus, to adopt Kavanugh's view, human beings are consumers and water is one of the many commodities humans can purchase, consume, waste and (try to) replace. When everything, even people, and certainly water, can be commodified, the negative implications of this worldview become apparent. This state of being is the "commodity form," a way of life intimately connected to "consuming and marketing," and one that ultimately exists as an all-encompassing worldview.[13] In this view of the world, humans are seen as "replaceable objects whose goal and value are dependent upon how much we market, produce, and consume."[14] I would argue that the commodity form has affected not only how we view human beings, but also the natural world. Water has also become a commodity which can be bought, traded, replaced, and sold.

What is a commodity? I see four ways to understand a commodity that are essential for understanding how water has been abused. First, a commodity is something that can be bought, traded and sold. Second, it is often given a price set by a market construct of supply and demand. Third, a commodity usually falls into the category of something that is perceived as unlimited, or there can always be more of a given good to purchase. Finally, a commodity tends to be used – or wasted – with a sense that it can be

---

[13] Ibid, 37.

[14] Ibid., 64.

somewhat easily replaced. [15] By defining a commodity this way, I am demonstrating that humans have come to believe that they have a particular power over water. This mindset which commodifies things often associates ownership with the ability to manipulate, waste, and replace a particular good. Humans do not own water, but rather are part of water's life cycle.[16] Failure to understand this real relationship with water has endangered the survival of all.

Water: Bought and Sold

A commodity is something that can be purchased, traded, and sold on the market. In defining a commodity here I am suggesting the way a consumer might view things at a supermarket.[17] In this light a commodity can be purchased and the consumer can always turn around and sell that good. Water is a resource that previously was found only in nature. Technology altered that and water became a resource delivered to homes through elaborate pipelines. Today water is sold in the supermarkets. Elaborate systems are in place to allow the consumer to buy water just about anywhere. This buying and selling of water, which has removed the connection of water with a resource in nature, is what I

---

[15] See "Theology H2O," in *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, ed. Tobias Winright, (Winona, MN: Anslem Academic: 2011), where Mark J. Allman argues that water is an interesting resource to try and commodify given its nature. Air, food, and water are three natural resources necessary for life according to Allman. Air is certainly not a commodity, but food is. So the debate over water management centers around whether water should be perceived as a commodity like food, or a free resource like air.

[16] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*. (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1988), 183.

[17] See *Green Discipleship* for a definition of commodity where it is said to be "an economic good, usually a physical product, such as oil or copper, which is sold at an equal price on commodities markets," 440.

argue affects the value system for water.

An example will help flesh out how I see water as a commodity it its ability to be bought and sold. Milk is a commodity. It is a good that is sold by a farmer to a distributer who in turn sells it to a supermarket where a consumer has the right to purchase it. Air, on the other hand is not a commodity because it cannot be bought and sold. Air exists in a form that prevents it from becoming another good for sale on the market. Water, like milk, is a commodity that has been turned into a good which a consumer can come to a supermarket and purchase. However, water also functions like air in that it is a resource present in nature that has life-sustaining qualities for all life forms. Water, like air, should be free and accessible to all species on this planet. Unfortunately, given the prevalence of the commodity form, it is not surprising that water has also become something that is valued for its economic worth, and is bought and sold with profit as a driving factor. Today, water is valued primarily for its monetary worth and associated with the profit margin it can garner on the market.

Market Value for Water

Water, viewed as a commodity, is a resource that carries a value that is determined by the market. The price of a commodity is usually connected to the societal demand for a given good and the available supply of that good.[18] For instance a diamond is a rarer commodity and has a high dollar value and price, while a can of soda exists in greater quantity and similarly has a price which reflects this.

[18] Water, some people argue, is far too important a resource to be left to the "whims of the market." See *Green Discipleship*, 387.

An example of something that has a market value which is connected to the value of that good is wine. A consumer can choose to pay $5 for a bottle of wine, or in excess of $50 for the same volume of a different brand of wine. The market has determined the best type of grapes, the most expensive region to extract these grapes from and thus what the consumer is willing to pay for various types of wine. Wine consumers can chose to spend the amount of money they have on the quality of wine they desire. Air, on the other hand, is not a commodity like wine. Air cannot be bought and sold. Air exists in nature and therefore is free to every living species. My point here is to show the difference between letting a market prince determine the value for a commodity. Water, like wine, has become something that a consumer can purchase in a supermarket. The problem which I address is the pricing of water at its market value.

A brief look at the trend toward the commodification of resources in nature will help elucidate what I see operative in the commodification of water today. When the principles of the market are applied to a natural resource, such as water, then the value is determined by the monetary price assigned to it.[19] There are some instances where setting a price for water may actually be helpful. For example, Charles Fishman, author of *The Big Thirst*, argues that water is something that for so long people have considered free, in which case a higher price might lead to a better sense of the true value placed on water.[20]

---

[19] David L. Roy, "The Religion of the Market" in *Visions of New Earth: Religious Perspectives on Population, Consumption, and Ecology*, ed. by Harold Coward and Daniel C. Maguire (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000, 17.

[20] The inverse and negative effect of "free water" has been expressed in an unhealthy and unsustainable relationship with water. See Fishman, *The Big Thirst*, 276-278 for more on this topic. Also see Roy, 22, where he argues that this pricing of a resource such as water and assigning values based on a market

However, the problem is not pricing water, but rather letting a market system mentality set the value structure for water. Fishman advocates pricing water in a way that might actually help human beings use water more wisely. He argues that water is something that for so long people have considered free. The inverse and negative effect of "free water" has been expressed in a wasteful and unsustainable relationship with water.[21] When the market determines a value for something such as water the market does not account for the ill-effects of this value structure. Similarly the market does not have built in mechanism to protect the interests of human and ecological needs. This is why letting the market determine the price and value for water is wrong.

Water as Unlimited

Water has become a commodity that is viewed as something truly unlimited. If it

---

schema has proven detrimental to the environment. This commodification of land in a sense has begun to "destroy the biosphere, the value of human life, and the inheritance of future generations."

[21] Water bills, Fishman maintains, are too low in certain parts of the world. He looks to places in Australia and New York City where people can actually let the tap run all day and see no difference in their water bills. Critics argue that perhaps pricing water in a more realistic way (which accounts for example the ecological destruction caused by overusing water) may actually lead to more responsible water usage habits. A better system which prices water according to use is what Fishman points to, one that actually accounts for the "critical human needs" and the environmental needs. Uses for water such a swimming pools and golf courses presumably would fall under a different pricing structure. He points to a water economist, Mike Young, who offers a sharing regime in terms of water to "bring clarity, order, and market pricing to bear on the big bulge of water that, in flush times, has been used with wasteful regard, and that in times of scarcity, is the source of bitter dispute." This sharing mentality for water actually accomplishes a great deal in terms of understanding the different uses and needs for water. The idea that water used to quench thirst might operate at a different place on the sharing schema than the water used to maintain a golf course. For more see Fishman, *The Big Thirst*, 276-282. For more on the various voices entering the debate on the pricing of water see for example Lestor Brown, *World on Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse* (New York: W & W Norton and Company, 2011). On the Chapter "Falling Water Tables and Shrinking Harvests" Brown argues that we must increase "water productivity," one such way to do this is to remove the water subsidies that keep water well below cost in the U.S. (150) He argues that by increasing the price of water in the U.S. people will be encouraged to use water more efficiently (172). This pricing argument is seen in other scholars such as Alex Prud'homme in *The Ripple Effect* who also states that we must price water accordingly to reflect its scarcity (388).

is viewed as limited, large corporations like Nestle do not seem to take this into account. In this regard water is separated from the scientific context that there is a fixed amount of water for all living species on the earth and turned into a commodity among commodities that exists in abundance.[22] Environmental scholars, such as David Korten and Vandana Shiva work with issues of water justice and have studied the problems associated with viewing the earth's resources as infinite. The 1944 United Nations Monetary and Financial meeting at Bretton Woods was the starting point for the notion that the Earth has infinite, free resources (including water.) The opening remarks for the meeting encouraged people to enjoy the "fruits of material progress on an earth infinitely blessed with natural resources."[23] Participants were told that "prosperity has no fixed limits."[24] This worldview which heralded a sense of unlimited prosperity and exploitative use of these perceived infinite resources on the Earth is known today to be inadequate given the reality that the global population has recently surpassed seven billion; there are not infinite resources to be used for this amount of people without regard for future generations. What does this view mean for water? The resulting assumption that a

[22] See Fred Powledge, *Water: The Nature, Uses, and Future of Our Most Precious Resource*, where he argues that "we have acted as if water were like air – free, so omnipresent as to exist beyond our conscious thought; so unquestionably necessary to like on this planet that it would be foolish to spend any time or energy thinking about it," 3. He gets to the heart of my argument that water is perceived by many to exist in unlimited form.

[23] David Korten, "Sustainability and the Global Economy," in *Visions of a New Earth: Religious Perspectives on Population, Consumption, and Ecology* ed. Harold Coward and Daniel Maguire (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 29.

[24] Ibid, 29.

resource such as water can be viewed as unlimited has been proven wrong.[25]

Commodities tend to be associated with things that are replaceable, repairable, and re-sellable, or put another way: unlimited. Many people in the developed world "consume water as if it had no value," and "consume it in the most ridiculous ways possible."[26] One of the ridiculous ways that Glennon might be addressing in the previous quotation is when people use water to clean a sidewalk instead of using a rake or broom. This is a common practice I see on the streets of Chicago.

The example around air again will help confirm my point here. A commodity like a phone has become viewed as something that is replaceable. In a place like U.S. on average people tend to replace their cellular phone with great frequency. When a new phone comes along, their old device becomes replaceable with something new, and often perceived as better. Air, on the other hand, is not replaceable in the same way. When an area undergoes severe pollution that air quality diminishes the quality of the air is often not replaceable, at least not in the short term until habitat changes are addressed. Water, like a phone, is seen as replaceable. When an individual runs out of water, a simple trip to the store is often all that is needed to replace the water. Yet, water, more like air, is also a resource that is not really replaceable. When a city runs out of water, there is no simple fix to find more water. Again, the perception is often that water is replaceable, yet more

---

[25] For more on meetings at Brenton Woods and the tones set there see Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars*, 92. Shiva reminds readers that the World Bank and IMF, along with some of the policies still in place today, were begun at this 1944 meeting.

[26] Robert Glennon, *Unquenchable*: *America's Water Crisis and What to do About It* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2009), 38.

like air, it is not easy to replace a city's or a community's water source once it is depleted.

Wasted Water

A commodity tends to be a good that can be used – or wasted – without regard for replacing it. The convenient accessibility of clean water in some regions of the world has allowed people in developed nations such as America to forget about the preciousness and necessity of this resource for all parts of the Earth. The average North American uses six hundred liters of water per day, while the average African uses six.[27] This convenience and commodification of water has turned water into a resource that is used wastefully and taken for granted in a place such as America. In other parts of the world people are dying due to lack of access to water based on an inability to pay the market price set for water.[28] This injustice is arguably connected to the wasteful uses and improper value systems for water. A whole new value system truly is needed to curtail waste and ensure all people have access to water for survival.

The Nestle case shows that when the commodity approach trumps all other concerns, the protection of nature is not taken into consideration. When water is used for irrigation and agriculture it is often returned to the local ecosystem and is not wasted; however, when water is taken from nature for bottling and selling, not only is water not

---

[27] Barlow, *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battled for the Right to Water* (New York, NY: The New Press, 2007), 5.

[28] Charles Fishman, *The Big Thirst: The Secret Life and Turbulent Future of Water* (New York: Free Press, 2011), see especially Chapter 9 which addresses the pricing of water: "It's Water. Of Course It's Free," pgs. 265-292.

returned to its source, it also causes more harm and devastation to nature.[29] The market does not protect against wasteful practices regarding water. In some ways as my next example demonstrates, the market might actually thrive on wasteful water uses.

Again an example will serve to demonstrate my point here. A paper-towel is a commodity that I argue is often wasted. In households in the U.S. paper-towels are used on a regular basis for a variety of things, often wasted and disposed of in mass quantity. In the Marshall Islands we did not use paper-towels, and there was not an entire aisle in the store devoted to numerous styles and brands to choose from. However, a commodity like gasoline is often not wasted, especially as the cost per gallon continues to rise. People are careful at the gas-pump so that no gasoline is wasted. People may often even consider walking or using alternate forms of transportation today given the rising cost of gasoline. Water, like paper-towels, is wasted and disposed of in many parts of the world without regard for its value. However, water is more like gasoline, in the sense that it should not be wasted due to its great value. People might do well to consider when to water their grass-lawn, or even if it is worth having a grass-lawn at all. In such a context where water is easily accessible – such as cities in the United States, raising water prices (which the market alone would not do given the high supply of water in such places) could effectively curb some of this wastefulness.

When water is wasted it is not valued for what it actually is: a limited resource necessary for all life forms on this planet. What is missing from a strict commodification

[29] Boldt-Van Rooy, Tara. "'Bottling Up' Our Natural Resources: The Fight Over Bottled Water Extraction in the United States." *Journal of Land Use*, vol. 18, iss.2, Spring 2003, 279 – 280.

of water is precisely that: the actual value of water. Human beings waste water because it is viewed solely as a commodity rather than valued as a life-sustaining resource. Ironically, it seems in parts of the world where water is scarce there are much better tactics for respecting and valuing water.

Ethical Evaluation of the Commodification of Water

The overarching problem with the commodification of water is that several private corporations and multi-national companies have seized an opportunity for profit from the sale and trade of water as the world faces a looming crisis with water scarcity.[30] Given the fact that water is such a necessary component of life, it is problematic that profit schemes can outweigh the human need for this resource. Peter Gleick, the co-founder of the Pacific Institute, which examines water issues from the angle of development and ecology, asks an insightful question on this topic of the commodification of water: "Are we going to permit water to become a commodity like oil, to be overpumped, underpriced, and used wastefully, leading to water wars, international conflict and competition and environmental destruction?"[31] Unlike a commodity such as oil, water cannot be owned in the traditional sense because of its

[30] For more on the ill effects of the commodification of water as addressed by the Food & Water Watch see "Water is not a commodity, Water is a common resource: The rational for States to hold Groundwater in a Public Trust:" http://documents.foodandwaterwatch.org/doc/WaterCommons.pdf, accessed July 2, 2013.

[31] Peter H. Gleick, "A Soft Path: Conservation, Efficiency, and Easing Conflicts Over Water," in *Whose water is it,?* 188. Gleick offers helpful insight on the values of water in an interview: "Questions and Answers with Peter Gleick," co-founder and president of the Pacific Institute for Studies Development, Environment, and Security in Oakland, CA where he states: "When we think about water just as something that comes out of our taps, we risk missing the bigger picture, which is the role that water plays in environmental health, human rights, and the global climate. So, part of the challenge around water is shifting the mindset from "this is a simple commodity" to "this is a global resource of global importance," see: http://www.pacinst.org/press_center/press_releases/PNAS_Gleick_QnA.pdf, accessed March 2, 2013.

transient nature as ice, liquid, and gas. And more importantly water, unlike oil, is necessary for life.[32]

Beyond the inadequate pricing of water for the needs of the poor, the market does not have the capability to reflect the true value of water. For example, "free water" that is available in most of the developed world is undervalued and therefore not helpful in arguing for a new ethical lens for water; while overpriced water in the developing world is so expensive that the poor cannot afford it. There are social injustices inherent in these value systems. The market is seemingly blind to the social injustices connected with the pricing system for water. Jenneen Interlandi argues that "a commodity is sold to the highest bidder, not the customer with the most compelling moral claim."[33] This gets to the heart of the downside of allowing a market scheme to set the value for water. Water is not something that can just be "sold to the highest bidder" since it is a resource so essential to life. The market does not account for the goods and their particular uses; rather, it seeks to maximize profit. Water has an inherent value much greater than the price assigned to it by the open market.

The unlimited economic growth of some nations and of some people has done great harm to the citizens of developing nations and to the Earth. However, today environmental scholars affirm that a resource such as water is and must always be viewed

---

[32] Robert Glennon, *Unquenchable: America's Water Crisis and What to do About It*, 245. Glennon looks at the devastating moral cost of treating water in the same way that the world has come to treat oil. For more on water and oil see Chapter 14, "Water: The New Oil*"* in Solomon, *Water*.

[33] Jeneen Interlandi, "The New Oil" in *Newsweek*, October 18, 2010.

as embedded in the natural ecosystem of our planet.[34] It is not acceptable to separate water from its function in nature in order to value water strictly as an economic good. Therefor it is essential to reclaim certain truths about water; it is a resource that exists in a limited supply. A commodity approach to water lacks the necessary attention required for the moral and ethical dimensions of the use and life-sustaining nature of water. When seen as unlimited, water is often wasted and used in terribly irresponsible ways.

Water, viewed strictly as a commodity, leads to problems for the poor and vulnerable. Beyond just the issue of the poor lacking the ability to pay for water, they also lose some of their autonomy and accountability regarding control of their own water. Water, as mentioned above, is a resource because it belongs to people as a human right.[35] As water is priced economically and sold based on business interests it no longer belongs to the local people; instead, it is owned by corporations who often operate remotely and make decisions without knowledge of the context of the local community.[36] When water is irresponsibly pumped for free by a remote corporation, several complicated dynamics emerge for the local people who lose access to their own water rights.[37] Water, when seen

---

[34] See for example Catherine Keller, "The Lost Fragrance," in *Visions of a New Earth*, 80. Keller argues that as a response to the people centered nature of development that was adopted as a result of Brenton Woods, theology must help to "re-embed the human within the planetary society of mostly non-human life, as a sustainable, civil, and humane economy *within* nature."

[35] Barlow, "The World's Water: A Human Right or a Corporate Greed?" in *Whose Water Is It?*, 39.

[36] Shiva, *Water Wars*, 28-32. Shivadetails how water sources suffered as community rights were taken away. The idea that the local water uses had a better sense of management and how to account for water in the ecological cycle deteriorates as private companies take ownership.

[37] One such example of the negative effects of the commodification of water is evident in the sale of water. In particular I experienced this sole economic prioritizing of water in the Marshall Islands. When I lived there in 2000 I was told by several Marshallese that the lagoon rights to the water that the atoll surrounded

as part of the "commons," is treated in a way seemingly different than when it is sold as a private commodity on the market. With these ethical implications of the commodifcation of water in mind, I turn now to the concrete practices that I argue are a part of the problem.

Water Practices Resulting from Commodification

The commodification of water has led to four effects which harm ecosystems and marginalized groups of people: privatization, pollution, diversion, and the bottling of water. Each of these four areas also exemplifies an overall view of water that emerges from a commodification scheme connected to my previous definition of a commodity. The privatization of water exemplifies how water is given a market value or price which correlates with the demand for water. The pollution of water reveals the ways in which water is wasted and not recognized for the value is has in its clean natural state in the environment. The diversion of water is a practice that stems from a understanding that water is unlimited, therefore human manipulation might not harm such an abundant resource. Finally, the sale of bottled water is an indicator of the practice which allows water to be bought and sold in just about any store or corner of the world today.

---

did not belong to the Marshallese, but had been sold to the Japanese. There was a great monetary exchange which aided the Marshallese in the short term, but the sad reality was that the Japanese owned, in the long term, the fish caught in the lagoon. They had access to the fishing rights of the lagoon. It was not uncommon to see large Japanese fishing boats with hundreds of shark fins strung across the top. Not only did the Marshallese not own the water that surrounded their islands, but they were not able to manage and use the water in a way that honored their generational knowledge of the fishing and weather trends that only a local islander has access too. This example will continue to emerge as one of the negative effects of commodifying water. Just like the Nestle example at the beginning of this chapter it shows that the sale of water often removes the local knowledge from the management of water which can have long-term effects. The Marshallese people have continued to sell these rights to other nations, and sadly have not developed their own large scale fishing operation. For more statistics relating to this transfer of water rights see: http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Marshall_Islands.aspx.

Privatization of Water

The commodification of water has resulted in the practice of the privatization of water, in which water is bought and sold by private companies, thus allowing such companies to profit from taking a local resource.[38] The process of privatization usually takes water rights from local communities and sells them to corporations who in turn sell the water back to the local people with a significant profit margin.[39] The corporations get richer, while the people on the margins pay more for water that was previously theirs. Throughout history, water-usage practices were set by the limits of ecosystems and the needs of the people.[40] This is not the case today. Modern technology has provided the opportunity to extract, transport, and manipulate water in a way that has never occurred before. Thus private corporations have found a way to make a profit on the movement of water across the globe.[41] Jospeh Sax, an environmentalist, states the complicating factor in ownership of water well: "unlike almost every other form of property, which we allow to be entirely privatized, water has always been viewed as something in which the community has a stake and which no one can fully own."[42] The privatization of water

---

[38] Shiva goes so far as to say that "destruction of water resources and of forest catchments and aquifers is a form of terrorism. Denying poor people access to water by privatizing water distribution or polluting wells and rivers is also terrorism." See *Water wars,* xiv.

[39] Joseph Sax, "Understanding Water Transfers: argues that privatization raises key issues in "who has, and ought to have" rights to water and further about the "rights of communities." *Water Ethics: Foundational Readings for Students and Professionals* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2010), 117.

[40] Shiva, *Water Wars*, 20; see also Robert Glennon, "Bottling a Birthright" in *Whose Water Is It?,* 14-24.

[41] See Joseph Sax, "Understanding Water Transfers," in *Water Ethics.*

[42] Ibid., 117.

raises an ethical question: can individuals or groups own, buy, and sell a natural resource necessary for life?[43]

In many cases the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have been key players in moving forward with the privatization of water. The World Bank and the IMF became involved in water issues in the 1980s. Developing countries were unable to meet loan obligations and the solution offered by the IMF was to privatize public sectors such as water to relieve some of the debt. By 2000, one hundred cities had their water managed by multinational companies.[44] Shiva argues that the World Bank is turning the water scarcity crisis into "a market opportunity for water corporations."[45] This corporate take-over of many water sources has led to a paradigm shift from water as a natural resource held in common to water as a commodity sold for profit.

Some of the greatest social justice violations emerge from this recent trend in water management toward privatization, which has proven to be detrimental to the poor

---

[43] One of the famous instances in which citizens fought water privatization was in Cochabamba, Bolivia. The World Bank stated that privatization was necessary to relieve six hundred million dollars in international debt relief. Shiva refers to Cochabamba as a tale of "corporate greed over water." In October 1999, privatization of the water supply began when Bechtel, one of the largest water companies, gained control over the municipal agency in Cochabamba. Water bills soared and families were forced to pay roughly a quarter of their salary to receive water. In January of 2000, citizens came together in protest to overthrow the laws allowing private ownership of their water. In April of the same year, the citizens won due to the large number of protestors and the persistence of their movement. By November of 2000, Bechtel had filed a lawsuit against Bolivia for twenty-five million dollars. In 2006 the dispute was resolved in court. The water was no longer owned by the corporation and Bolivia did not have to pay Bechtel. Not only does this story show the harmful effects of privatization, it also demonstrates the power local people can have when they commit themselves to a fight for just water in the face of corporate greed. See Shiva, *Water Wars*, 103; see also Chamberlain, *Troubled Waters*, 122.

[44] Brown, *Plan B: 3.0*, 117.

[45] Shiva, *Water Wars*, 86.

and undermines the notion of water as a human right.[46] Although advocates of privatization argue that markets can solve the problem of water scarcity, markets cannot always account for the ethical and moral dimensions of water.[47]

Injustices abound with these privatization schemes. First and most importantly, the price of water has risen dramatically. Second, the quality of the water has deteriorated. Brown looks to an example in Manila, where water prices have increased five hundred percent since 2001 while at the same time instances of cholera have been on the rise.[48] Often the poor pay significantly more than their rich neighbors within the same country. In Lima, poor people pay roughly three dollars for a cubic meter of water which is often unclean. Wealthy citizens pay around thirty cents for the same amount of water which is treated and therefore clean.[49]

Finally, once privatization of water sources is implemented, public and local control over the water diminishes significantly.[50] The people closest to the water source and those most affected by it have little or no say in how the water is managed, priced and distributed.[51]Thus privatizing water sources also leads to a dual negative affect on the

---

[46] Barlow, *Blue Covenant*, 60; See also Glennon, who argues in *Unquenchable* that "multinational corporations are exploiting the dire economic situation of poor people," 246.

[47] Jeneen Interlandi, "The New Oil" in *Newsweek*, October 18, 2010.

[48] Brown, *Plan B 3.0*, 119.

[49] Barlow, *Blue Gold*, 59.

[50] Ibid., 91.

[51] See Glennon, *Unquenchable*, who states that even though privatization is an elastic concept, "privatizing any aspect of a municipal water system risks shutting out the public from participation and insulating a company's practices from transparency and accountability," 249.

marginalized, not only are their traditional practices and local measures to secure water undermined, the cost they pay for unclean water is exorbitant.

The privatization of water has also led to some devastating effects for nature, like those addressed in the Nestle case study earlier in the chapter. When water is viewed as an economic good there seem to be few policies in place which protect the ecological value of the river or stream from which the water comes. When water is privatized, "who buys water for nature and for the poor?" Barlow claims that part of the water crisis results from modern consumer culture driven by acquisition and convinced of its supremacy over nature. In ancient cultures people knew how to care for water sources and understood the vital connection they served for human survival.[52] A profit-driven model pays little attention to the natural value of water in a particular locale.

The problems of privatization stem directly from the commodification of water. If we were to value water appropriately, privatization might be appropriate in some cases in order to meet the needs of the poor and vulnerable. For example, Glennon asserts that privatization is not always an unjust approach to water, offering an alternative voice to the critics of privatization. Although he cautions against corporate greed in the management of water, he notes that corruption and mismanagement can be found also at the local level. Although privatization of water resources has several shortcomings, there are places and instances where privatization may be a helpful step toward improving

---

[52] Barlow, *Blue Gold*, 3.

water management.[53] For example, water can be privatized, bottled, and sold to meet emergency needs where water is inaccessible.[54]

However, in most cases, the commodification of water leads to it being bought and sold without regard for the poor. Commodified water is sold at a market price that prioritizes profits over the needs of the poor.[55] Thus a natural resource once readily available becomes expensive and lackluster in quality. Through privatization schemes, water is managed through market dynamics which call for increasing consumption and maximizing profits.[56] The downside of this is that many who are unable to afford the high price of privatized water turn to inadequate sources and end up facing the health risks associated with unclean water. For John Hart, an ecological ethicist, denying people and living things their proper right to water is not only immoral and unjust; it becomes an act of genocide.[57]

Hart uses strong language to indicate the severity of the water crisis. I add to his idea that the commodification of water has actually exacerbated the crisis since it has skewed the way humans interact with water. Statistics such as the 1.8 million children

---

[53] See Glennon, Chapter 16, "Privatization of Water," 243-252, in *Unquenchable*.

[54] Potter, "Drinking to Live," in *Ethical Consumption*, 128.

[55] See Barlow, *Blue Gold*, Chapter 5, "Global Water Lords," which addresses the rapid increase in price with privatization and the quality lapses in sanitation and quality service. She looks to places such as Buenos Aires.

[56] Barlow, *Blue Gold*, 89. See also Glennon, *Unquenchable*, 246.

[57] John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 80.

who die per year as a result of unclean water are not lost on Hart.[58] Only respiratory illnesses claim more lives in children than unclean water.[59] It is estimated that three million people, mostly children, die prematurely due to water-related diseases in the developing world.[60] Preventable diseases resulting from unsafe water kill more children than AIDS, malaria and measles combined.[61]

Based on this health statistics connected to water, numerous reports call for clean water as a way to end poverty. Again, when water is commodified there can be problems with access to water and this results in an increase in disease and premature death. When clean water is not affordable or readily available, girls, who are responsible for walking long distances to secure water, often are unable to attend school. In Peru, studies have shown that with proper sanitation and clean water children are fifty-nine percent more likely to survive.[62] For peasants, water scarcity leads to starvation and destitution as drought eliminates their crops and livelihood.[63] The commodification of water which allows the market to set a price for water fails to account for the huge health risks and quality of life compromises that exist for the most marginalized groups, especially

---

[58] Chamberlain, *Troubled Waters*, 2.

[59] Ibid, 2.

[60] "Water in a Changing World" in *The United Nations World Water Development Report 3*, (UNESCO: 2009), 41.

[61] Millenium Water Alliance, 5.

[62] Chamberlain, *Troubled Waters*, 2.

[63] Shiva, *Water Wars,* 15.

children, when they are unable to afford the price of water.

The diseases attributed to sub-standard water quality claim the lives of millions around the world. With many human disasters, such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, lack of clean water and cholera are some of the first public health issues to emerge. When I experienced a cholera outbreak in the Marshall Islands, we had to spend a great deal of time and energy ensuring that people washed their hands in special buckets filled with bleach. This provided another moment for me to recognize the great disparities around the world in terms of access to clean water. Scholars refer to this as "water apartheid": the world is divided along lines of those who have access to safe water and those who do not.[64] Linda Whiteford calls for a moral economy of health which would provide for reliable water sources and value access to these sources as a human right.[65] Critiquing the commodification scheme of water raises awareness of issues such as these around health and sanitation and can shed light on more responsible behaviors and attitudes towards consumption and conservation of water.

The solution to the water crisis lies in new management styles and solutions. However, strict commodification and profit-driven decisions regarding water do not lead to the best outcome for all species which depend on water. Privatization, while initially seen as a strategy to alleviate stress in water scarce regions, often causes more harm than

---

[64] Whiteford, Linda and Scott Whiteford, *Globalization, Water, and Health: Resource Management in Times of Scarcity*. *(*Santa Fe: School of America Research Press, 2005), 45.

[65] Ibid., 43.

good.[66] Better forms of management for water are needed, and there are no clear answers as to what this new governance for water might look like. Shiva calls for "ecological democracy" in which local communities and the ecosystems that sustain them have a moral claim which is not necessarily honored by a free market approach to water. Her ideas call for greater local participation from water users, and more accountability for the ecological value of water.[67] Similarly, Margaret Catley Carlson calls for new management structures for water which also protect the environment and the poor people who are suffering due to unclean water. She demands "increased public participation processes at all levels" and "more power-sharing in the consultative and decision-making processes."[68] These are scholars who are aware of the downside of privatization and want to see more transparency in water management decisions. Privatization of water is a practice that uses an economic framework to manage water. I have shown that there are some notable injustices connected with turning water into a private commodity. Next, I turn to the pollution of water, which I argue increases along with the commodification of water.

Pollution

When water is commodified and water usage is poorly regulated, I argue that it is not valued for its role in nature. Thus when water is not valued for its role in nature,

---

[66] Ibid, 102.

[67] Shiva, *Water Wars*, 15.

[68] Margaret Catley-Carlson, "Working for Water" in *Whose Water Is It*?, 72.

pollution runs rampant. The wasteful use of water leads to more polluted waterways which is devastating for ecosystems. The market does not adequately account for ecosystems and how a resource like water plays an essential a role in the health of the earth. Therefore, the pollution of water becomes one of the effects of viewing water as a commodity. Commodities are viewed as replaceable things that exist in abundance; in this way, there will always be a way to secure these things and at times waste or lose respect for things already owned. This mentality that things are replaceable fuels the market and may work for certain goods, but the logic does not convert to a resource such as water. Water, unlike a commodity like a car, exists in limited quantity. Water cannot be outsourced, created with new parts, or manufactured at rapid pace to meet a growing need. However, the danger in treating water like someone might treat a car emerges when water is viewed as a market good. Cars fall apart and the consumer can purchase another one, while water is not replaceable or easily "fixed." Thus, the risk of treating water like other goods that can be used, disposed of, and replaced is what leads to pollution of water.

Pollution is also one of the most pervasive and grave components of the water crisis. Between now and 2050, the human population is expected to grow from 7 billion to 9.2 billion, meaning that even more pollution will end up in our rivers, lakes, streams, and even our rain water.[69] People all over the world dump waste in rivers and lakes without thinking of the consequences. Having been expelled as human waste after

[69] http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wpp2008/pressrelease.pdf

consumption, pharmaceutical drugs have recently been found in water sources across the United States.[70] These waterways are too dangerous for swimming, fishing and drinking.[71] This pollution of water is affecting the way humanity relates to water wreaking havoc on once pristine lakes, oceans, and rivers.

The Chicago area is surrounded by the Great Lakes, which account for eighteen percent of the world's fresh water.[72] The Great Lakes provide water to more than forty million people and actually comprise the largest fresh water system on earth.[73] However, these lakes are a "degraded ecosystem."[74] Swimming in these lakes and eating their fish is now dangerous.[75] Tragically, the Lake Michigan ecosystem, once the thriving life source for a region, is turning into a threatening toxic dump. It was not long ago that these waters were fit for drinking without any treatment; today one must use caution even to swim in the water or to enjoy its beaches. Unlike true commodities, lakes, however, cannot be cleaned and returned to their unpolluted state. There is no way to buy a new

---

[70] The documentary *Flow* details the increasing incidence of pharmaceutical drugs ending up in water sources.

[71] Maude Barlow and Tony Clark, *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (New York: New Press, 2002), 28.

[72] Peter Annin, *The Great Lakes Water Wars* (Washington: Island Press, 2006), 4.

[73] See Alliance for the Great Lakes, accessed November 10, 2012, http://www.greatlakes.org/issues.

[74] Jame Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 237.

[75] Ibid., 237.

lake once the present ones have deteriorated.[76] Harm to water sources, in the form of pollution, is one of the hallmarks of viewing water only as a commodity. When rivers and lakes are seen as dumping grounds, instead of integral sources of the planets life source, the commodity view has failed to honor the true worth of water.

Scholars and activists alike have taken up the cause of advocating for the needs of the marginalized, especially women and children, when it comes to the water crisis and how damaging privatization can be for these groups. However, fewer voices are weighing in on the negative effects of the commodification of water on ecosystems. Water sustains the earth, provides nourishment for trees, makes agriculture possible, and comprises the hydraulic cycle that supports all life. In many ways this is the operation of water that often goes unnoticed and can be easily taken for granted. Human wastefulness and mismanagement resulting from a commodity-based approach are interfering with these essential functions of water. Pollution of water and the general misuse of water is a result of seeing water as only a commodity and failing to value water for its essential role in nature. Failure to connect the economy with the "world of the biosphere" cashes out in manipulative practices for the earth.[77]

The commodification of water risks ignoring the externalities. William French

[76] The Aral Sea in the former Soviet Union is often used as an example of the devastating effects of human manipulation on the livelihood of this sea. In the 1950's water in this region was diverted from rivers that supplied the Aral Sea with water (the largest freshwater lake in the world) to produce cotton. Within fifty years the lake had lost 2/3 of its water and had turned into a "salty dust bowl." The fishing industry vanished and the local climate changed dramatically with the loss of the healthy lake. See Steven Solomon, *Water*, 377-378, for more on the Aral Sea and similar fates of other water systems as a result of human manipulation.

[77] David Suzuki with Amanda McConnell, "A Child's Reminder," in *Whose Water Is It?*, 181.

defines an "externality" as something that "exists when the market price fails to incorporate the full costs of the production and costs for using a good or a service."[78] Pollution, especially to waterways, is one such externality. The commodity approach has no way to account for such negative externalities like pollution. Similarly, Al Gore notes that failure to measure "environmental externalities is a kind of economic blindness, and its consequences can be staggering."[79] Gore argues that economic textbooks fail to account for how our economic choices lead to pollution and depletion of natural resources.[80] Failing to respect water for more than its economic value leads to greater damage for the water cycle. I look next to another facet of the commodification of water: the diversion of water ways which has led to the construction of thousands of large dams

---

[78] William French, "On Knowing Oneself in An Age of Ecological Concern," in *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*, Jame Schaefer, ed. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2011), 145.

[79] Al Gore, *The Earth in Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit* (New York, NY: Rodale, Inc., 2006), 189.

[80] Ibid., 183. Gore also states that "every time we consume something, some sort of waste is created, but this fact is conveniently forgotten by classical economists" 187; for more on "externalities" see: William French, "On Knowing Oneself in an Age of Ecological Concern" in *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives.* Another example regarding the commodification of a natural resource is seen in the treatment of forests. Forests are another example of an overlooked, undervalued resource. Forests are cut down to create both space for people to live and expansions of crop land needed to feed expanding population. They are also destroyed to maintain the production of goods ranging from paper to furniture. This unfortunate loss of trees and forest ground leads to a dramatic decrease in water absorption by the earth, which in turn has a negative effect on the water cycle. A forest actually serves as a natural dam by absorbing water and then slowly releasing it into streams and rivers. As forests disappear less water is absorbed by the earth, which leads to more floods and landslides. Without forests there are fewer ways for water to return to the atmosphere, which in turn leads to a decrease in rainfall. The Amazon rainforest in Brazil demonstrates the powerful way in which forests protect ecosystems globally. The Amazon cycles water, through the clouds, into the interior regions of South America. Thus as the rainforests shrink, rain patterns are adversely affected. Surrounding regions receive less rain and the rainforest habitat becomes drier and more susceptible to fires. This harmful cycle emits more carbon gases into the atmosphere. For more on the commodification of forests and the tool this has on the water cycle see: Shiva, *Water Wars*, 3. Shiva reiterates the idea that commercial forestry has devastating effects for water and the water cycle as it operates in nature; Barlow, *Blue Covenant*, 19; and also Brown, *Plan 4.0*, 200.

across the globe.

Diversion

Another way that water is commodified is how it is diverted from its natural course of flow, whether with the building of large dams or through the over-use of rivers. In this way water falls into the definition of a commodity as it is viewed as something that is unlimited; therefore, human technology can alter its use for short term gains. Perhaps the honest assessment about a river that is so overdrawn it fails to reach the sea is compromised because there is an underlying mentality that somehow in the future there will always be more water, regardless of how we care for water at present.[81] Large dams have impacted the natural flow of waterways and hundreds of rivers no longer reach their original destination. Here again, when water is viewed as something that is unlimited there is little attention to the great harm this manipulation and diversion causes.

A bit of context for the history of dam-building practices will help elucidate how I see diverted water as part of the commodification of water. Although communities have used dams throughout history, dating back to the aqueducts in ancient Greece, recent technology has increased the creation of large dams, thus enabling humans to interfere with the natural flow of water on a massive scale. Because of dams and irrigation usage, the Colorado River no longer has enough water to reach the sea after running through seven states. In the 1970s across America, hardly a major river flowed freely because of

---

[81] Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1988), 1-13.

all of the dam construction.[82] More than forty-five thousand large dams have been built around the world.[83] This large number illustrates the great extent of human manipulation of waters. Although dams serve several seemingly beneficial purposes**,** such as allowing the build-up of reservoirs for irrigation of agriculture, the harm they cause must be a factor in discernment regarding their construction.

I do not argue that water can never be diverted or altered; in general dams do serve many pertinent interests for local and global community needs for power, electricity and the movement of water. However, the recent trend toward massive building projects for dams to meet profit interests too often do not account for the overall good of water and ecosystems. Like pollution, the diversion of water is connected to a view of water which is seen as a commodity that has importance primarily for immediate gain for short term use of water, yet the long term devastation to ecosystems has far-reaching effects. The flow of water, once manipulated and diverted, lacks regard for natural, necessary cycles.[84] It is the commodity view of water that encourages the building of a large dam or the over-use of a river, such as the Colorado, and fails to

---

[82] Steven Solomon, *Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2010), 349.

[83] Barlow, *Blue Covenant*, 22. For more information on large dams (which is one that is greater than 15 meters high) and the general timeframe for building them (the highest volume of construction was between the 1950's and 70's) see: http://www.internationalrivers.org/questions-and-answers-about-large-dams, accessed September 1, 2013.

[84] See Barlow, *Blue Gold*, 48-50. Barlow details some of the macro-effects of large dams, which include altering the earth's crust beneath dams due to the massive weight of water, this can cause tremors and has been linked to earthquakes; dams increase the surface area of water in areas exposed to sunlight which increases evaporation and alters climate patterns in certain regions; and the harm to fish migratory patterns based on dams.

account for the negative effects of these actions.

Vandana Shiva discusses the destruction that dams have created in India, particularly to the Ganges and the Narmada, two sacred rivers having great significance in India. Once dams were created they displaced local villagers and peasants who in turn protested since their way of life was disrupted and their sacred sites were destroyed.[85] Additionally, the building of dams means that water control shifts from the local community to the central government, which does not usually prioritize the needs of the people who once had access to that water. Shiva refers to this as not only the colonization of people, but also of rivers.[86] Similarly, in the Patagonia region of Chile, a group has formed called the "*Patagonia sin regresas*" or "Patagonia without the dams" in protest to the massive dams that the government plans to build.[87]

Dams not only divert the water and prevent it from reaching its natural destination, but they also displace people, creating a social injustice.[88] The World Commission on Dams estimates that forty to eighty million people have been displaced due to dam construction.[89] It is often those who are poor and the most vulnerable who are most affected. Some view dams as a practical way to bring water to where it is needed;

---

[85] Shiva, *Water Wars*, 63.

[86] Ibid., 53.

[87] "Chilean Patagonia Without Dams," last modified December, 6, 2011, http://www.patagoniasinrepresas.cl/final/index-en.php.

[88] Chamberlain, *Troubled Waters*, 98.

[89] Shiva, *Water Wars*, 67.

however, closer study reveals that dam-building often forces people off of their land and interferes with ecosystems by decreasing biodiversity.[90]

Dams, like privatization and pollution, carry with them some harmful effects, often to those already marginalized. An example of a negative outcome of the diversion of water is seen in schistosomiasis, a disease resulting from poor water quality. Schistosomiasis, a fatal illness that harms mostly women, is transmitted through snails often found in places where women in the developing world go to collect water.[91] The incidence of schistosomiasis increases in areas of heavy irrigation and dam building. Some regions in Africa had no evidence of the disease until dams were built, which led to entire communities becoming infected.[92] The World Health Organization estimates that schistosomiasis affects 207 million people worldwide, mostly in poorer countries, as a

---

[90] Barlow, *Blue Covenant*, 23. Dams often bring water to major cities, especially as the population grows and as increasing numbers of people shift to an urban lifestyle. This trend toward urbanization is one of the hidden affects on the water cycle. The greater density of people in cities increases water demands in a concentrated place. Brown reports that in 1900, thirteen percent of all people lived in cities; today, the number is fifty percent. This represents a significant migration which leads to dramatic effects on human food and water needs. As humans congregate in mass numbers, so, too, does their waste. As this waste accumulates, sanitation and disposal problems are compounded. Dietary patterns also change in cities as people tend to eat more, especially meat-rich diets and products of other water intensive crops, especially as people in cities gain more income. This urbanization trend is often connected with more affluent lifestyles and a higher standard of living, creating the need for richer diets leading to more consumption and, of course, more waste. Producing a kilogram of wheat requires roughly a thousand liters of water. On the other hand, producing a kilogram of meat takes roughly five to ten thousand liters of water. An abundance of water is needed to sustain an urban diet, but most people are truly unaware of the super-abundance of water needed to sustain this. Fishman claims that our "water footprint" tends to be large because we "see" water as invisible. In this way we fail to realize how much water we consume or pollute in the production of items we use daily. For more on the use of dams and the lifestyle this diversion creates: See Brown, *Plan B 3.0*, 27; Chamberlain, *Troubled Waters*, 99; Barlow, *Blue Covenant*, 16; and Fishman, *The Big Thirst*, 8.

[91] Whitford, *Globalization, Water, & Health,* 27.

[92] See WHO, http://www.who.int/water_sanitation_health/diseases/schisto/en/.

result of unclean water and inadequate sanitation. Eighty five percent of those infected live in Africa. An estimated seven hundred million are at risk of infection based on the water they use on a daily basis. Along with the risk factor to women, children are also more susceptible to the disease based on their activities near infested water.[93]

Not only is there little effort to eradicate diseases such as schistosomiasis and cholera, but practices such as dam building also exacerbate the problem by increasing the likelihood of transmission. Commodification of water which increases diversion practices impacts health as water becomes harder to obtain in poorer regions of the world. Like other problems that stem from viewing water as a commodity, it is the poor who suffer greater harm, in this case especially women and children. Large dams contribute to economic growth, leading to great development and progress in some parts of the world; however, their harmful effects are often not factored into the immediate success the dam might bring. Dams add to the commodification of water as there is a great profit in dam building and the way water is diverted as a result. I turn now to the final practice connected with the commodification of water: the sale of bottled water.

Bottled Water

Another facet of seeing water as a commodity is perhaps the one that is most visible today: the production and sale of bottled water. In examining the bottled water industry, we see the commodification of water, a commodity like other commodities on the shelves of the supermarket. When water is bottled and sold on the market it is truly

[93] See WHO, http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs115/en/.

something that is regulated by supply and demand. This is clear in the dramatic increase of bottled water usage in the U.S. The demand for water sold in a glamorous, sleek, decorated bottle has risen, thus the supply has exponentially grown to meet this need. Perhaps the most telling illustration of the commodification of water can be viewed in the water aisle at the grocery store. The vast array of successful bottled water varieties seems strange given the fact that the U.S. has clean tap water. Bottled water has become a welcome, and even fashionable, commodity on the U.S. market. This section addresses how bottled water has turned into one of the most lucrative industries in the world today.

Bottled water has become a symbol of status and convenience in an affluent place such as the U.S.[94] Charles Fishman argues that "bottled water has become the indispensable prop in our lives and culture."[95] In America and around the world humans are consuming mass quantities of water in bottles and are paying absurdly high prices for it. Bottled water entered the scene packaged in an effective marketing scheme with pictures of ice capped mountains and running streams that have convinced humanity of how important it is for our daily lives. This propelled bottled water to become a central fixture next to taps and sinks. Chamberlain asserts that the bottled water craze in many ways is addressed to the "economically advantaged" as water can be found for "sportsmen and sportswomen," "pregnant women," for "growing children," and for

---

[94] Peter Gleick, *Bottled & Sold: The Story Behind Our Obsession with Bottled Water* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2010), 4.

[95] Fishman, *The Big Thirst*, 133.

"babies."[96] Surprisingly, even the seemingly "green" supermarket chain Whole Foods reports that bottled water is its second most popular item.[97] Whole Foods, a grocery store that claims to foster sustainable and organic living, sells more bottled water than most foods on its shelves. This illustrates that even supposed ecologically-minded living can become a commodity itself as a symbol of status.

Ironically, the bottled water for which people pay exorbitant prices is often less safe than the tap water that flows into our homes in America. The bottled water industry is not regulated nearly as well as tap water. One study conducted in March of 1999 found that one-third of 103 brands of bottled water had more than normal levels of contamination.[98] The clever marketing schemes often use images of mountain streams and tropical islands, giving the consumer the idea that this water must be better than what comes from the local tap.[99] The reality is that the Food and Drug Administration mandates daily regulatory checks for tap water while the bottled water industry is tested

---

[96] Chamberlain, *Troubled Waters*, 101. Emily Potter in "Drinking to Live," also asserts that consumers today have the choice to consume "ethically branded" bottled water. These are companies which sell bottled water and then turn around and donate some of the profit toward improving water quality for those most in need. Today, Potter argues, people can strive toward "ethically orientated production and consumption," 116-128.

[97] Ibid., 133.

[98] Barlow, *Blue Gold*, 143.

[99] See Glennon, *Unquenchable*, where he argues that Nestle profits merely by using the word "spring" in the title for many of their brands of bottle water for what the word evokes in consumers imaginations, the sad reality, however, of pumping water from actual spring (instead of a few miles away) destroys the natural water levels of the springs as well as ruins the habitats for fish, birds, and other animals in the area, 45-46.

by the FDA once a year.[100] Water fountains have slowly disappeared as public water is "increasingly pushed out in favor of private profit and control."[101] Thus the places where water is easily available and well regulated, water fountains, are disappearing as the variety and specialization of the bottled water industry grows exponentially.

There is both a financial and an ecological cost to this bottled water culture which commodifies water and turns it in to one of the most in-demand goods on the US market. The amount of bottled water sold worldwide has risen from roughly one billion liters in the 1970s to around eighty-four billion liters in 2000.[102] Not only are the numbers staggering but the pollution resulting from its production is even more shocking. The plastic used for the bottle often contains harmful chemicals and only five percent of these bottles are recycled, leaving the rest to crowd landfills. It takes copious amounts of energy and funds to transport water around the world; after all, water is not a light substance.[103] Finally, bottled water is often taken from areas that are facing more and more scarcity.[104] Additionally, bottled water companies do not have to pay the costs of landfills or oil consumption, leaving these as hidden costs for society and ecosystems. The bottled water craze exemplifies the harm to the natural processes of water which

---

[100] David Clowney and Paricia Mosto ed., *Earth Care: An Anthology in Environmental Ethics* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 471.

[101] Gleick, *Bottled & Sold: The Story Behind Our Obsession with Bottled Water*, 3

[102] Chamberlain, *Troubled Waters*, 101.

[103] See Glennon, *Unquenchable*, 44-46. See also Elizabeth Royte, *Bottlemania: How Water Went on Sale and Why We Bought* It, (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

[104] Barlow, *Blue Covenant*, 100.

results from the commodification scheme in place at present.

Bottled water also has negative effects on ecosystems. As noted in the Nestle Case, the production of bottled water often wreaks havoc on local water systems as they are drained and depleted at a faster rate than they are able to renew themselves (footnote). In 2006, producing enough bottled water for U.S consumption required more than seventeen million barrels of oil and three liters of fresh water for every one liter bottled. Additionally, the bottling process emitted more than 2.5 million tons of carbon dioxide into the environment.[105] The strong GDP of the U.S. measures this consumption of bottled water in a positive way. The reality of what bottled water does to the environment reminds water advocates that the GDP does not tell the entire story.[106]

The use of bottled water also sadly has undermined the financial and civic trust and commitment to tap water, which is a reliable public option for water, at least in the developed world.[107] An entire generation of people who grew up drinking tap water have now become dependent on bottled water. As a result their children form a habit of preferring bottled water to the tap. Again, clever marketing has targeted children with cartoons, colors and flavors to interest them in water from a bottle. This bottled water has become an unnecessary indulgence. Context is crucial here. Affluent cultures spend millions to hydrate in a convenient fashion while developing nations are trying to survive

---

[105] Richard A. Hughes "Pro-Justice Ethics, Water Scarcity, Human Rights" in *Journal of Law & Religion* Vol.XXV, 6/17/2010, 524.

[106] See Al Gore, *The Earth in Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, especially Chapter 10: "Eco-nomics: Truth or Consequences," (New York: Plume Printing, 1992).

[107] Fishman, *The Big Thirst*, 135. See also Glennon, *Unquenchable*, 48

without access to clean water. [108] Instead of using free, clean tap water, many in the developed world buy less regulated, costly water while millions go without any safe water.

Although bottled water leads to ecological harm and irresponsible consumption, the availability of bottled water can have certain advantages. I have certainly benefited from the positive side of bottled water while living and working in places where the water quality was not adequate for human consumption. I was one of the lucky people able to purchase clean bottled water in places such as Tanzania and Nicaragua. During a crisis such as Hurricane Sandy shipments of bottled water are necessary to help people who are without homes or access to clean and safe water. Studies have shown that with the rise of the bottled water culture in developed countries people are actually drinking more water, and even choosing to drink water instead of soda, which is a healthier option.[109] However, I am critical of the everyday commodity approach to water in a bottle that has sprung up in a place like America.[110] People often choose to drink bottled water for convenience, in spite of the great economic cost and harm to the environment, instead of relying on the clean water that flows through a tap. I see bottled water, especially in a place like the U.S., as one of the most insidious and problematic trends in the commodification of water.

---

[108] Ibid., 133-136.

[109] Glennon, *Unquenchable*, 47.

[110] Potter in "Drinking to Live," notes the backlash against bottled water in affluent countries such as the U.S. as consumers have become more informed of the negative effects of bottled water, however, this she argues is what has increased the use and sale of "ethically branded bottled water," 121.

Conclusion

This chapter addresses my entry into a value system for water. There are numerous ways to appreciate water. I maintain that valuing water in a strict economic sense is the key problem. When we look at water only through the commodity value frame, we ignore many other values, resulting in the misallocation, theft, and unjust, unsustainable use of water. Water, viewed as a commodity with great earning potential, fails to account for the life sustaining nature of this resource. Water, unlike other commodities, cannot be substituted by yet another commodity. Thus, when water is privatized and becomes unaffordable, people lack access to an element necessary for life, a resource crucial for human dignity. This privatization scheme for water has led to harmful effects for the poor and marginalized who suffer while large corporations gain enormous profits.

Further, when water is commodified and only accounted for in ways that are set by market principles, there is not a sufficient way to protect and to recognize the importance of water in nature. This is seen in the increase in pollution and diversion of water sources that are suffering at increasing pace as the water crisis intensifies. Failing to honor and value the importance of water in nature not only harms ecosystems at present, but has lasting consequences for future generations.

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate how context certainly plays a role in the various ways water is commodified. How water is sold, used, and valued varies across the globe. In the U.S. water is often underappreciated due to its low cost and

constant supply. Bottled water is a popular item in the U.S., in spite of the easy access to clean water from the tap. A place like the Marshall Islands, which depends on the rain and weather patterns to secure water, respects water in a way that demonstrates the experience of living without water. The Marshallese conserve, value, and respect water in a very different fashion than Americans. Similarly a place like India experiences the hardship associated with the massive dam projects where people are misplaced and exposed to various water-borne diseases as a result of water diverting tactics. Clearly there is not one solution to all of the problems associated with the commodification of water, but I do argue that the solution lay in a new system for valuing water.

Throughout this project I suggest alternative value systems for water which I argue will help develop more equitable practices for the distribution of water. Although water is often thought of as a commodity, close attention to the biblical and sacramental tradition shows that water is a sacred resource, a common good, and an essential element for the health of the Earth community. Thus, in order to distribute water justly, Christian ethicists cannot treat it as merely a commodity. I argue that the commodification of water creates a great injustice to marginalized peoples and the ecosystems of the Earth and therefore is an inadequate approach to water.

My next chapters, then, delve into various Christian sources for constructing an alternative value system for water. Ultimately, I ask: what is the most just approach for valuing water? Is it enough to claim that water is a human right? What about the rights for nature? In other words, what is lost when a resource such as water is viewed only as an economic good? What about the intrinsic value placed on water when it is used in

baptism, or as it was understood in biblical and ancient times?

Barlow advocates the view that fresh water is intended for all species on the earth as part of the "commons." Therefore, no one has the right to sell it for profit. She suggests a radical change in our lifestyles to incorporate a proper appreciation of water.[111] Recognizing that at present water is often seen as a commodity is a crucial first step in responding to the ethical dimensions of the water crisis. When water is valued only as an economic entity, there is little room for the sacred and cultural significance which operates in just about every human relationship with water. This is the work of my project: highlighting and suggesting other approaches to water from the viewpoint of a Christian ethicist. What might Christian ethics have to offer as a more just alternative to the commodification of water?

[111] Barlow, *Blue Gold*, xvi.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GENESIS CREATION ACCOUNTS AND PSALMS:

THE SACRED STORY OF WATER

> While I am not certain what counts as sacred for the reader, if water doesn't qualify, little else should. Though we may ordinarily pay it little mind, largely because we confront it as a commodity, something deep within us senses its mystery and its spell. Many have become everyday mystics in the course of quiet hours beside crystal waters that seem to flow from the throne of God…something inside us is pulled into poetry, religion and fear by water, it seems.[1]

As a source of Christian ethics, the Bible can contribute a particular value of water to an ethic of just water. The sacred story found in scripture presents a theology of water which can further critique the commodious view of water. Before turning to that source, I point to three water stories from my own experience that also point to the sacred and support my claims that water is sacred and that our relationship with water needs re-examination.

The natural force and power of water has the potential to evoke a particular humility before water. Alinglaplap, one of the small islands in the Marshall Islands where I spent two months, was completely cut off from the larger islands where necessary supplies could be purchased at stores. The islanders lived on a diet of fish and local foods. Accessible only by boat and a small plane making weekly trips,

[1] Larry L. Rasmussen, *Earth-Honoring Faith: Religious Ethics in a New Key* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 276.

Alinglaplaphad no running water which forced the islanders to collect their water in large cement receptacles called catchments. While getting water from the catchment one day, I realized that the water level was very low and shared with a Marshallese friend my concern. I asked what we would do if the supply of rain water ran out. She said to me in the local language, "Don't worry, God will provide." Of course, I did worry, as someone who has lived in an environment where I have never faced a water shortage or its corresponding consequences. The Marshallese, on the other hand, have lived through several water shortages, experienced the effects of dehydration frequently, and knew well the sickness encountered from drinking contaminated water. Sadly, this is their water reality. During my two month stay on Alinglaplap we were lucky to have enough rain to keep our water supply constant. The Marshallese people relate to and recognize water as a gift from God.

Imagine for a moment how different these two depictions of water are. One is the image of a pristine gushing stream running down a mountain in Colorado, surrounded by wildflowers, Aspen trees, and mountain goat. The second is the picture of a bottle of a 16-ounce 'Poland Spring' water displayed on the aisle of a grocery store. Both of these images are of water. One shows water in its natural setting, arguably its sacred setting, one where it is worthy of reverence and awe. The second image is of water as a commodity. Water here is removed and separated from its natural setting at sold for around $1.99 at a local grocery store. In both cases, water is used in the same way for nourishment, whether from a stream or a bottle, but the association, relationship, and interaction an individual might have with these two conduits for delivery is quite

different. These two views of water show different operative value systems. Water in the stream connects to the sacred value and appreciation for water as a part of nature. Water in the catchment is experienced in nature. Water in the bottle represents the commodified version of water, so prevalent and common today, where water becomes one object among many to be consumed. I use certain values attributed to water presented in the Bible to critique the modern concept of commodified water, the water in the 'Poland Spring' bottle. Water is viewed as a sacred good in the story of Genesis and the Psalms. This is the view of water I use to critique the commodifed view which understands water as something that exists solely as a commodity or solely in a bottle, sold on the shelves of a local store.

The world is changing quickly with technological advances and exponential population growth. These changes are more acute to the Marshallese or Coloradan citizens living next to a dwindling stream. As rain and weather patterns change, the Islanders are affected more directly than I am in my context in Chicago. Emergent weather patterns mean that streams no longer flow their natural course through the state of Colorado. The people of Alinglaplap have a similar relationship to nature as the peoples of the biblical stories. Though thousands of years apart, both cultures lived with a particular awareness of nature, and the weather patterns such as rainy and dry seasons.[2] Water in Alinglaplap is not bought, sold, or even stored for profit. Water is recognized as an element of nature that has life-sustaining values, yet is not always easily available.

[2] Heibert, *The Yahwist Landscape* (New York: Oxford Press, 1996), 55. Heibert discusses the agricultural needs and dependence on rain for the biblical community.

Water is never wasted. Water is honored for the relationship the Islanders have with it, and without it. I suggest here that the worldview of a community of people is of utmost importance. The people of the Marshall Islands and the Ancient Israelites lived with a contextual relationship with water that was shaped by their location which impacted their worldview.[3] According to environmental scientists, we all may soon face water shortages.[4] Those of us who live in places with seemingly abundant water can and should learn from the biblical peoples who were aware of their delicate relationship with water. Thus, along with showing the story of water as sacred, I argue that Genesis and Psalms present a particular worldview that honors water as one of the goods of creation.

Finally, I present one last vignette about water. Five years ago, September 13, 2008, Hurricane Ike struck land in Galveston, Texas with record winds extending over 100 miles an hour. Like many Americans I watched the news coverage of the storm and was awestruck by the power of water, the death toll of near 200, and the damage that lay

---

[3] See Madipoane Masenya, "An Ecobosadi Reading of Psalm 127. 3-5," in *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*, ed. Norman Habel (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2011), 109-122. Masenya makes a similar move to argue that her community in South Africa holds a worldview with commonalities to that which was operative for the Israelites. The Earth Bible Series, of which this book is a part of, are helpful commentaries with scholarly articles regarding the importance of reading the biblical text from the perspective of the earth. The six ecojustice principles that guide much of the scholarship are 1. the principle of intrinsic worth, 2. the principle of interconnectedness, 3. the principle of voice, 4. the principle of purpose, 5. the principle of mutual custodianship, and 6. the principle of resistance, for more on these principles see *Earth Bible Team*, 2000, 38-53.

[4] E.O. Wilson, one such scientist, argues that this "exponential growth in both the human population and technologies impacting the environment" forces us to ask the question: "Is humanity suicidal?" The same finite water cycle that adequately sustained 1.6 billion people in 1900 is what seven billion people are struggling to survive with today. In Ebeye, a coral atoll in the Marshall Islands, the same water that supported 981 people in 1954 now must accommodate the needs of roughly fifteen thousand. Water scarcity will become the norm instead of the exception for more and more parts of the earth. For more information see: Edward O. Wilson, "Is Humanity Suicidal?" *New York Times Magazine*, May 30, 1993; Monica LaBriola, "Iien Ippan Doon: Celebrating Survival in an 'Atypical Marshallese Community'," 2007, 56; and Edward O. Wilson, *New York Times Magazine*, May 30, 1993.

in the wake of the wind and rain. Humanity had no control over the chaotic force of both water and nature. The images were devastating. However, this storm was significant to me since I watched the news worried about my brother and his family who were trying to escape the destructive force of the storm by evacuating from their home in Houston. My brother left Houston in time and he and his family were safe. However, their home was destroyed. They lost just about everything in the storm. The damage to their actual house was severe and all their property was lost. Even now as my brother reflects on the terror, the fear and the sadness over the storm, there is something greater that he shares: a true sense of humility in the face of nature, an understanding of the chaotic ability contained within water, and a healthy sense of detachment regarding his material possessions.

This humility and respect in the presence of nature is also found in Genesis and the Psalms. I am not trying to claim that my brother is like the characters in the Bible; rather, I describe certain similarities expressed by people that know well the chaotic force of water. There is a sense of deep understanding about humanity's place and vulnerability on the earth for those who have experienced nature's ability to destroy. The books of Genesis and Psalms, as this chapter discusses, reveal a people who knew well the destructive and chaotic force of water and correspondingly understood a particular sensibility of their dependence on God and nature for survival.

The texts of Genesis and Psalms give Christians an alternative understanding of water: water is a creation of God that deserves reverence and respect. While the commodity view of water assumes that water is a good that can be bought and sold, the biblical vision of water often communicates God's presence. The commodity view leads

to practices which exacerbate the pollution and diversion of water, while water in the Palms is an element worthy of praise, celebrated for its life-sustaining worth, and the beauty it presents for all of the earth. I argue first that the Bible presents a worldview that is a useful tool for critiquing the commodification of water. This worldview honors water as a good of creation, not just a tradable good for the use of human beings. Next I argue that water in the Bible is viewed as an intricate part of the natural world, not something that can be owned or re-directed by human technology without certain consequences. The Bible portrays this throughout the many passages containing water as that which sustains, destroys, and blesses life. Finally, the biblical authors depict well the chaotic force of water and the corresponding humility that humanity might exhibit in the face of this facet. Water as a chaotic component of nature cannot be tamed by human beings who wish to treat water as only a commodity.

This chapter looks at particular biblical presentations of water: water as creative, destructive, sustaining, and as a conduit for God in Genesis and the Psalms. I then take these themes and discuss the unique contribution they make to an ethics of water justice. Each theme has import for the practices of commodification which I address throughout this project. The creative force of water raises questions about the right to privatize water and own it as a good without regard for its function in nature. The destructive element of water critiques humanity's desire to control, tame, and manipulate the state of water. When human ingenuity is unchecked, it leads to destructive practices that have negative consequences. In order to diminish the practices that undervalue and pollute water, the human community must honor this resource as a life-force that sustains all of creation.

Finally, God's presence in water serves as a final and grand critique for all the commodious practices around water, especially the rampant bottling and selling of this resource.

Method

As complex and multi-layered as a general understanding of water may be, trying to glean a unified approach to water from the Bible may be even more difficult. The Bible is not a unified text; rather it is a group of books written by different authors at different times. Furthermore, the Bible contains "diverse points of view" and "diverse interpretive methods" that "can yield diverse readings of any given text."[5] Carol S. Robb cautions readers to see the "cultural and historical conditioning of biblical texts" in order to make any sort of leap to apply the themes found there to ecological issues of our day.[6] Although it is challenging to present a coherent picture of water found within the various books, in this chapter I turn to scholars who have offered interpretations on how the biblical authors have approached water as a resource in and of itself, and as a part of God's creation, not something that humans can control, manipulate, and own.[7]

It is challenging to turn to the Bible to address an ecological concern today since

---

[5] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York, NY: Harper One, 1996), 1.

[6] Carol S. Robb, *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit: Biblical Ethics and Climate Change* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 79.

[7] For a helpful summary of the diverse voices from the Bible and how they might be interpreted in light of ethical issues today see Robb, *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit*, pgs. 70-86. See also Suzanne Franck "*Sophia* Wisdom & Climate Change" in *Con fronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*, Jame Schaefer, ed. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2011), 38-54. Franck argues for the unity within various books of the Bible for gleaning an ecological theology today.

the text comes from such a different time and place and the interpretative methods can lead to a host of different meanings. Yet, as a Christian ethicist, I maintain that the Bible is a necessary starting place for grounding a Christian approach to water. One needs caution to note the different ways in which interpreters have interpreted, re-interpreted, and used this material throughout history in imposing a certain understanding of the relationship between the human and nature, men and women, and God and Earth.[8] At times the Bible has been used to support a view of the human *against* the natural world, which I wish to critique throughout this chapter.[9] Gary Chamberlain and many of the scholars I engage in this chapter question these age-old assumptions in an "effort to place Christian thought in the service of ecological reform and to develop new visions of human relationships with the natural world."[10] Thus the Bible can become a source of inspiration for forming moral imaginations which have a sense of the true interdependence that exists between humanity, and all the living and non-living species on Earth.

To get at this wisdom in the Bible I use a particular method. In using scripture, I do not take passages from the Bible and make claims about how to use water today, in terms of storing water in wineskins or relying on the power of God to produce a well.

---

[8] See Chamberlain, *Troubled Waters*, for a clear summary of the biblical concepts and Christian tradition that have often been used to emphasize the dualities between "humans and nature, the spiritual and the bodily, the afterlife and this life, grace and sin" which have reinforced a "view of the natural world that sees it at the best service of the humans," 44.

[9] Ibid., 44

[10] Ibid., 44.

Rather, I will look to particular passages in both Genesis and the Psalms for insights about the way water was valued in ancient times. I do not imagine I will find answers to the way to secure clean water in our culture today, or any clear guidelines as to how to justly distribute this precious resource. Rather, I will focus on themes that will help describe a paradigm for valuing water as a part of God's creation. This may illuminate how to respect water at present. Stanley Hauerwaus argues that our moral imaginations are formed as we engage these sacred stories, rituals and symbols.[11] Thus, the mere act of engaging the meaning of water biblically and cultivating an awareness of water has import for understanding the ethical value of water. The Bible may then be a place to begin articulating an alternative view of water informed by the imaginations of the ancient authors. I will not argue for a return to pre-modern understanding of nature; instead, I advocate sensitivity to the way all parts of creation are affirmed and called "good."

I situate myself among other scholars who are looking to the Bible with an ecological hermeneutic and argue for an "eco-justice sensibility of biblical thought."[12] The voices I rely on are not taking the Bible and using it to make arguments for how to live today, but rather looking to more sweeping themes relating to humanity, God, and

[11] See Stanley Hauerwaus, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).

[12] *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans* (Boston, MA: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 2000), xxxix.

nature.[13] Like feminist scholars who read texts attuned to women's voices and experiences, I read Genesis and Psalms with focused attention on water, in particular how water is valued, used, and appreciated. Thus I read the biblical stories with a keen insight for the sacred story of water that lies therein. In reading with attention to water, I hope to develop further the views the authors portray about nature, God, and humanity. I assert that the way the ancients viewed water might have some importance for a cosmocentric appreciation for water. This retrieval could supply the foundation for an alternative to the commodification of water.

The historical development of biblical scholarship has impacted the Christian imagination in many ways including the corresponding value of the earth and human beings' relationship with the earth. The stress in modern theology has usually been on the human-centered dimension of creation and how humans relate with God. I join a host of recent scholars who are examining the biblical texts to explore any and all of its resources which extend this human centered dimension to include just relationship with all living beings, with all of nature, and how the living Earth relates to God, in essence moving

[13] For instance, Fred Van Dyck, an environmental ethicist, uses the Bible to form a Christian ethic for the environment by looking to God's relationship with nature as it is portrayed in the Bible. Theodore Heibert, a theologian, reads the Bible through a particular focus on nature, arguing that the Bible is not only the story of history but also of nature. He critiques the interpretations of the Bible that have led to anthropocentric views of the world. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Catherine Keller, both feminist theologians, approach the text with particular themes in mind: covenant and chaos. See Fred Van Dyke *Between Heaven and Earth: Christian Perspectives of Environmental Protection* (Santa Barabar, CA: Praeger, 2010); see also Heibert, "Rethinking traditional approaches to nature in the Bible," in *Theology for an Earth Community*, 29.

from an anthropocentric worldview to a cosmocentric one.[14] For example, the land "flowing with milk and honey" can be interpreted as a symbol of God's blessing, not only for humanity, but for the entire Earth community. This is a notable new trend in biblical scholarship: to value humans as part of the land, instead of separate from the land, since land is biblically "the very realm of redemption."[15] Further, the dualistic terms that were previously used to interpret nature and humanity in scripture are "inadequate and misleading."[16]

---

[14] See for example Randall Smith "Creation and the Environment in the Hebrew Scriptures: A Transvaluation of Values" and Thomas Bushlack "A New Heaven and a New Earth: Creation in the New Testament" in *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*, Tobias Winright, ed. (Winona, MN: Anslem Academic: 2011), 74-113.

[15] Heibert, "Rethinking Traditional Approaches to Nature in the Bible," in *Theology for an Earth Community: A Field Guide,* ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996), 29.

[16] Ibid. See also for more on this debate about nature and the Bible, Lynn White's famous article: "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967), 1203-1207; here, White argued in 1966 that Christianity (and numerous interpretations of the Bible) has put forth a human-centered value system with devastating implications for our ecological crises. Noting that we live "very largely in a context of Christian axioms," White looks to Christianity to understand people's relationship with nature. And since Christianity is the "most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" there is good reason to delve into religious motivations for ecological concerns. Like other scholars who make similar arguments, White focused on the interpretation of Genesis 1 narrative to ground his arguments. His interpretation of history and of the Bible has been called into question by many (see for example: Hava Tirosh-Samuelsom, "Judaism and the Care for God's Creation" in *Green Discipleship*, 286-319; Anne C. Clifford, "Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God" in *And God Saw That it was Good*, 19-46.) Anne Clifford argues in response to White's interpretation of the Bible, that the Bible is not anthropocentric; it is thoroughly "theocentric." Further, she claims that the criticism of the Genesis creation stories "is based on a simplistic literal reading of then and clearly does not represent the core meaning of these texts." For more see Clifford, "Foundations," 24; see also Wendell Berry, "The Gift of Good Land" in *The Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural* (San Francisco: North Point Press), 1981.White's article had a power both within and external to the Christian community. It mobilized a massive response from Christian theologians. It is hard to find an article about ecological theology that does not in some way reference the critique toward Christianity offered by White. In many ways he set off a movement within the Christian tradition to revitalize and uncover ancient truths and interpretations of the Bible and how the environment did indeed play an extraordinary role in the history and experience of the early Christianity.

The Biblical Theology of Water in Genesis and Psalms

Water is a central feature of the geography of the biblical stories as well as a central component of the ancient people's lives. The prominence of water in scripture is hard to miss. The creation stories center around water as a defining element of the earth. In the story of the flood, water destroys the Earth before receding and offering a new start for creation.[17] In Exodus, the journey of the once-enslaved Hebrews from oppression to liberation passes through the water of the Red Sea. Joshua leads the wandering Israelites across the Jordan River into the Promised land. In that same river Jesus humbly submits to the rite of baptism and begins his public ministry. Throughout scripture, water plays a central role in creation, cleansing, liberation and new life. Not only is water essential for humans and celebrated in the dry, arid regions of the biblical times, it also served to sustain all of creation.[18]

The biblical description of water usually falls into one of two categories: either as a substance necessary for life and cleansing or a conduit for great danger and

---

[17] The covenant between God and Noah upholds the previous covenant between God and creation. The story of the flood that is recounted in Genesis 6 is a result of the "wickedness of humankind." The flood describes God's "un-creation" and "re-creation" of the world. Thus wickedness leads to the flood and destruction of the earth, yet God offers a second chance through Noah, a "re-creation." Jurgen Moltmann argues that the covenant with Noah is a covenant "*with us* which provides the basis for *human rights* in our human dignity." From this covenant, then flow the rights of "*future generations*," and "*every living creature*." See Jurgen Moltmann, "God's Covenant and Our Responsibility" in *The Care of Creation* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 111. This book provides responses to An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation, showing the variety of Christian approaches to ecological care and justice.

[18] E.A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 3-20; see also Mark Allman and Gary Chamberlain for sweeping summaries of water in the Bible which touch on more than just a focus on Genesis and the Psalms which I am concerned with here.

destruction.[19] This is the biblical, or sacred, story of water: a depiction of water quite different from a scientific story, and as I argue, drastically different from the story of water as a commodity. Perhaps no other natural image presented in Scripture signifies the sacred more than water. Mentioned more than six hundred times in the Bible, water is a significant feature of the sacred history recounted there.[20]

Environmental justice has been defined as "the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things."[21] The concept of environmental justice, then, can be developed in these biblical texts.[22] Responsible and balanced uses of the land are revealed throughout the biblical stories, as well as stories of exploitation of the land which led to destruction. Just like the Islanders of Alinglaplap lived in a way that paid attention to the natural cycles of the water and Earth, there is something to be examined in the way groups of people, who are not dominated by technology and material abundance, live with deep appreciation for the land.

To get at this value system for water that I see operative in scripture I focus on Genesis and the Psalms. Given the limited scope of my project, these are the two places

---

[19] See Mark Allman "Theology H2O," in *Green Discipleship*, 388-390.

[20] Ibid., 388.

[21] Andrew Dobson, *Justice and the Environment: Conceptions of Environmental Sustainability and Dimensions of Social Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 23.

[22] Numerous scholars have addressed this topic. Books that I found to be helpful exploring this topic are**:** A*nd God Saw That it was Good*; *God, Creation, and Climate Change: A Catholic Response to Environmental Ethics*; *Sun, Wind, Soil, Spirit; Eco-Theology.*

where I ground my arguments for the way the biblical authors understood water. Recognizing that looking to water in either Genesis or the Psalms could comprise a project in and of themselves, I will be brief while addressing some of the operative themes in these two collections of texts. I chose Genesis, focusing on chapters 1-9, because of its two stories of creation, both of which rely heavily on the image of water, and the significance of water found in the flood narrative. Genesis is also the place that several ethicists turn to make ecological claims for justice today.[23]

The Psalms present some of the most beautiful poetic texts in the Bible.[24] I find in these passages a great diversity in the way water is understood. Genesis and the Psalms, when read together, touch on most of the major themes regarding water found throughout scripture. The four themes I focus on next are: 1) water as a creative life force, 2) water as a destructive and chaotic element, 3) water as a conduit for God's presence, and finally, 4) the life-sustaining nature of water.

Water as a Creative Force and Defining Element of the Earth

Genesis begins on a cosmocentric note: creation is in fact the story of the earth's beginning, an explicit focus on more than just the human world.[25] Water is one of the

---

[23] See for example Heibert, "Rethinking Traditional Approaches to Nature in the Bible," in *Theology for an Earth Community: A Field Guide;* Edwin Good *Genesis I-II Tales of the Earliest World* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed. Bernhard Anderson.

[24] Toni Craven and Mary Jo Kaska, "The Legacy of Creation in the Hebrew Bible and Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books" in *Spirit and Nature: The Study of Christian Spirituality in a Time of Ecological Urgency* ed. Timothy Hessel-Robinson (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publisher, 2011), 17.

[25] Tim Hessel-Robinson and Ray Maria McNamara, RSM, "Introduction" in *Spirit and Nature*, 7.

most important elements for the basis of creation as God "swept over the waters"[26] and "a stream would rise from the earth;"[27] the centrality of water as an element of creation was common in the ancient near east.[28] Edward Matthews, a biblical scholar, looks to Ephrem the Syrian, a fourth-century author, who uses water to interpret the whole Genesis narrative, and asserts that it is through "light and water that the earth brought forth everything."[29] This sense that creation emerged from water is in harmony with other sources from this time – for example in Egyptian mythology, the God of water, Nu, was thought to be the source of all things.[30] As in other creation myths, Genesis 1 depicts water as a central building block of creation; God's spirit moves "over the deep" and "[sweeps] over the face of the waters." Next God fashions a "dome in the midst of the waters," and calls it the "Sky."[31] After creating the sky, the waters on the earth are "gathered together into one place," which gives name to the "earth" (the land), and the "seas," (the gathered waters.)[32] The 'waters' are the first place from which God "brings

---

[26] Gen 1:2

[27] Gen 2:6

[28] Edward G Matthews, Jr. "Water in the First Creation Account of Genesis 1 in the *Commentary on Genesis* of Ephrem the Syrian," in *Imagery and Imagination in Biblical Literature: Essays in Honor of Aloysius Fitzgerald, F.S.C.*, ed by Lawrence Bodt and Mark S. Smith, (Washington, D.C.: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2001), 136.

[29] Ibid., 135.

[30] Ibid., 136; see also Marcia Eliade, a religious historian, where he argues that "water is the reservoir of all possibilities of existence" in *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt Press, 1957).

[31] Gen 1:6-7

[32] Gen 1: 9-10

forth swarms of living creatures."[33] And all that God created was referred to as "very good."[34] This Priestly story of creation in Genesis 1 reveals a God who separates, divides, and organizes which leads to a "dramatic account that celebrates the wonder and worth of the earth."[35]

The second creation account follows and the narrator presents a different voice and emphasis on the elements of creation, including water. [36] Here there are no waters of the deep, but rather a stream will "rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground."[37] In this account the human is formed from the "dust of the ground."[38] The waters help structure the foundations of the land as "a river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches."[39] Carol Newsom, a biblical scholar, argues that this narrator is keenly aware of the land and the role the rivers played in defining that land.[40] Each branch of the river is given a name and marks a

---

[33] Gen 1: 20; see also note in *The Anchor Bible: Genesis* on the significance of water teaming with creatures; 6-7; see also Norman Habel, "Geophany: The Earth Story in Genesis 1," in *The Earth Story: Genesis* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 37.

[34] Gen 1:31

[35] Habel, "Geophany," in *Earth Story*, 35.

[36] E.A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, 14-20.

[37] Gen 2:6

[38] Gen 2:7

[39] Gen 2:10; see also commentary on this verse from Carol Newsom, "Common Ground: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 2-3," in *The Earth Story: Genesis,* 60-72.

[40] Carol Newsom, "Common Ground: An Ecological Reading of Genesis 2-3," in *The Earth Story: Genesis*, 64.

particular place on Earth. The man and women are both naked and "not ashamed" in the garden.[41] This account is attributed to the Yahwist source, which some have suggested comes out of an agricultural context.[42]

Genesis 2 depicts a more organic view of nature than the more structured and ordered view of nature in Genesis 1. Similarly**,** water is depicted in this more organic way in the second account in that it flows, emerges from, and is a living part of Earth.[43] In Genesis 1 God demonstrates power and authority over the waters; in a sense the waters need to be controlled, ordered from the chaos of their original state. This depicts a different image than a stream which flows from the earth in Genesis 2.[44] In the second account the rivers must be divided by God's command. The biblical authors were aware of a particular value system for water which was connected to the vital role it played in creation and survival for the earth. Although they come from different traditions, the two creation stories in Genesis reflect on an important truth: Earth and its resources do not belong to humanity. The power of water, understood biblically, was beyond human

---

[41] Gen 2:25.

[42] Heibert, *Yahwist's Landscape*, 147.

[43] See *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, 8-18, for a description of the vocabulary and stylistic differences between the two accounts. Gen 1 is more impersonal, formulaic, and austere, while Gen 2 uses a more earthly and personal approach to recount the creation narrative.

[44] See Howard M. Wallace, "Rest for the Earth? Another Look at Genesis 2.1-3," in *The Earth Story Genesis*. He argues that there may be implications of the Sabbath mentality for the earth. Thus resting – a true Sabbath- might lead to an experience of humility for humans on the earth regarding the order of creation since there is little time for rest in a culture that "emphasizes human domination over creation, and individual control over space and time," 59. This gets to the root of the different points of emphasize in Genesis 2 as it portrays a more modest view of the human on the earth.

control, it was a created good of the earth, not a commodity.[45]

Not only is water critical in the creation accounts in the Genesis creation stories, it also features prominently in the creation accounts found in the Psalms. In Psalm 74 God "divided the sea" and "cut openings for springs and torrents."[46] Continuously caring for God's people, God, "split rocks open in the wilderness, and gave them drink abundantly as from the deep." And further, God, "made streams come out of the rock, and caused waters to flow down like rivers."[47] As in Genesis, the presence of water at critical moments in creation is discernible in the Psalms.

The psalmists celebrate this creative capability connected to water. The power of water to bring about the flourishing of life is also seen in the fertility motif present in the Psalms. The psalmist expresses gratitude for God's gifts, prompting God's people to "drink from the river of [their] delights."[48] The beauty of the created world, sustained by water, is praised in Psalm 46 as the psalmist describes the earth where the "mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam," but there is "a river whose streams make glad the city of God."[49] Water is the source of fertility for the earth in the

---

[45] Chamberlain argues that several stories from the creation narrative point to the "reconfiguration of nature, including water," and serve to "express the power and majesty of a transcendent God," *Troubled Waters*, 44.

[46] Psalm 76:13-14

[47] Psalm 78:15-16

[48] Psalm 36:8; see also *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, ed. Bruce M Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 793.

[49] Psalm 46, see also *Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 793.

rain and rivers.[50] God's care is mediated through the waters, especially in the creation of the earth and the continued life-sustaining capacity found in water. Water is a life force, a creative force, and revered throughout Genesis and the Psalms for the way it is intimately connected to life; however, water also is the location for destruction and even death, the theme to which I now turn.

Water as Destructive

Water is not only a key component of creation, but it also has an extremely powerful capability to destroy creation. Genesis 6 presents the first account of the destructive force of water in the Bible. God brings a "flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die."[51] This has been referenced by scholars as the undoing of creation.[52] Yet Noah, the one who found favor with God, was commanded to build an ark and remain there with his household and several animals. God sent rain "for forty days and forty nights."[53] It was not until after forty days that God made a "wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided."[54] This destructive capacity of water is seen as a symbol for a God

---

[50] Mark D. Futato, "Sense Relations in the 'Rain' Domain of the Old Testament," in *Imagery and Imagination in Biblical Literature: Essays in Honor of Aloysius Fitzgerald, F.S.C.*, ed. Lawrence Boadt and Mark S. Smith, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2001), 81-94.

[51] Gen 6:17

[52] Craven and Kaska, "The Legacy of Creation," in *Spirit and Nature*, 39.

[53] Gen 7:4

[54] Gen 8:1

who grieves.[55]

The biblical flood is caused by humanity's immortality as opposed to some of the other ancient flood stories in circulation which attributed floods to alternative causes.[56] Scholars connect the flood with God's response to the sin and wickedness manifest amongst humanity.[57] The flood is a response to a rupturing of created relationships.[58] Yet, in spite of the wickedness attributed to humanity, Noah, is singled out "for deliverance from the impending universal catastrophe."[59] Therefore, the flood story not only represents the destructive nature of water, but also points to the possibility of reconciliation. The rainbow that follows the flood in Genesis 9 is a symbol of reconciliation, even amidst the destruction that individual human beings are capable of inflicting on one another and on Earth.[60] In spite of the destructive power of water, God

---

[55] Craven and Kaska, "The Legacy of Creation," in *Spirit and Nature*, 20.

[56] Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, 55; several scholars argue that the flood recalls the watery chaos of Genesis as the waters are unleashed upon the earth, for more see Anderson, *Creation in the Old Testament*; Van Dyck *Between Heaven and Earth*, 65-58.

[57] Ken Gnanakan "God's Covenant," in *God's World: A Theology of the Environment*, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1999), 61.

[58] Ibid, 61. See also W.J. Drumbell, *Covenant and Creation – A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Cumbria, England: Paternoster Press, 1984.) It is worth noting that scholars look to the Genesis story and in particular the Noachic covenant as an "ecological covenant." See for instance: Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 25; Anderson also connects this flood account to the "new creation out of watery chaos," stressing the significance of water in this story; see also Anderson, "Creation and Ecology," in *Creation in the Old Testament*, ed by Bernhard Anderson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1984), 160; Nash argues that the covenants between "God and the liberated people – which include the Noachic Covenant embracing all creatures – where understood in part as God's laws for right relationships, Nash, *Loving Nature*, 164. The covenant with Noah, then, initiates a type of relationship with God, humanity, and creation.

[59] Speiser, *The Anchor Bible*, 55.

saves humanity from the devastating effects of water.

Floods were not the only manifestation of the destructive power of the waters. The biblical stories also recount how fragile life was in the face of the elements: water in excess or in absence proved to be equally destructive. The desert climate posed an equally challenging reality for the peoples of ancient Israel. One such story about the absence of water is depicted in Genesis 21, with Hagar and Ishmael. In the text, Hagar is sent away with her son along with a wineskin of water and some bread. When the water is gone she fears death for her child and places him under the bushes. When Hagar "lifted up her voice and wept," God opens her eyes, and "she saw a well of water." After this she is able to give the boy a drink of water from the well.[61] Life endures, overcomes death, in the presence of water.

The Psalms, similarly, contain numerous depictions of water as a site of destruction, despair, and even death. Psalm 69, truly a Psalm of lament, begins with the psalmist asking to be protected from the waters that "reached my neck," when encountering a flood.[62] In the next verse, the psalmist complains, "my throat is

---

[60] Ibid., 55, for more on the role of the flood, see *Anchor Bible* 54-65; Holmes Rolston, III also reads this Noah story with a unique perspective on the environment. He claims that the Bible "records the first Endangered Species Project" with Noah and the ark. He argues that this story presents a concern from God that the continuation of each species (not just the human) has import. This story reveals a "perennial reverence for life;" See "Duties to Animals, Plants, Species, and Ecosystems: Challenges for Christians," in *Eco-Justice: The Unfinished Journey*, ed. William E. Gibson (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004).

[61] Genesis, 21:15-19; also note that Hagar has been kicked out of Abraham's household, so she is emblematic of all of those who have been marginalized.

[62] Mitchell Dahood, *The Anchor Bible: Psalms II, 51-100,* 152; see also Anchor Bible 156 which describes this particular language around water as signifying the psalmist noting that "the verge of death" is near.

parched."[63] Even though surrounded by water, the psalmist complains of a dry throat due to the constant cry for God which has left no moisture to speak of.[64] Within a few lines the power of water in its diversity is revealed: too much water in a flood, and the scarcity of water when there is not enough water to moisten a throat. As the psalmist prays to God regarding enemies encountered, the expression of exacerbation is conveyed when relaying having "vinegar for thirst" instead of water.[65]

The psalmist in Psalm 18 calls out to God for protection in a storm. God's voice is "thundering from heaven," and the "storming breath of your nostrils" is attributed to God's command of the storm. In describing God's actions the psalmist recounts, "he reached down from on high and seized me; drew me out of deep waters."[66] From the distress of the waters, the psalmist is saved. Translators of the biblical texts note that the deep waters signify the nether world; so the psalmist here has been rescued from death.[67] God's power and presence in the storm is revealed here in the ornate descriptions.[68] This theme of God revealed in a storm is notable in other psalms, including Psalms 29, 96, and

---

[63] Psalm 69

[64] Dahood, S.J., *The Anchor Bible: Psalms II*, 156.

[65] *The Anchor Bible: Psalms*, 162.

[66] Psalm 18; see also Dahood, *The Anchor Bible: Psalms I, 1-50*, 110, who notes the meaning of the waters here connect to the "waters of oppression"; see also Psalm 42 for a similar theme: the destructive forces of "the deep," this psalm opens with the imagery of a deer longing for running water, revealing the author's souls longing for God. The psalmist calls in a distressed state that "deep calls to deep in the roar of your torrents, and all your waves and breakers sweep over me."

[67] Dahood, *The Anchor Bible: Psalms* 110; See also *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 97.

[68] See also *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 1632.

97.[69] The poetry of the Psalms seemingly represents a literary vehicle to describe the complexity of a people's relationship with water.

Water as a Source for Blessing, Nourishment, and Sustenance

Apart from the destructive force connected with water, the Bible also reveals several accounts of its blessing and nourishing capabilities. Water is revealed as a blessing in the end of the flood, when the water recedes and the Earth rests and is healed. Here, the destructive nature of water gives way to its power for restoration and sustenance. Hagar's story mentioned above not only depicts the dangers of insufficient amounts of water, but also the presence and blessing of God manifest in the water found in the well. Similarly, references to the land of Canaan depict a land flowing with "milk and honey," a place which is "well watered everywhere, like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt."[70] The abundance of water, the availability of water, the nourishing substance of water are representative of God's blessing.[71] Whether in ancient cultures or today, this life-sustaining capability of water is central to appreciating the full story of water.

As in Genesis, water is a symbol of blessing throughout the Psalms. Psalm 104 is often compared to Genesis as it depicts in poetic form the creation of the Earth, where

---

[69] See Norman Habel and Geraldine Avent, "Rescuing the Earth from a Storm God," in *The Earth Story in the Psalms,* 42-50.

[70] Gen 13:10

[71] See Michael Guebert, "Water for Life: Global Freshwater Resources," in *Keeping God's Earth: The Global Environment in Biblical Persepctive* ed. Noah Toly and Daniel Block (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 143-164.

water plays a prominent role. God in this account set "the beams of your chambers upon the waters," and "the deeps covered it like a garment; above the mountains stood the waters."[72] It is after God's command that the waters retreated from the land, restoring the Earth to its previous state. Next the poetic imagery reveals watering springs, animals nourished by waters, and the grass and trees sustained by water. The flourishing of the earth is connected with God's command over water. This hymn praises God for the beauty of the earth and depicts the power of water for maintaining and blessing all life. The psalmist shows reverence for all of God's creatures on the earth and in the sea, "great and wide" which similarly "teems with countless creatures."[73] Psalm 104 celebrates the function of water as that which sustains and nourishes the earth. Whether in the streams that nourish the animals or the rains that feed the plants, water is the life-source of all creatures on Earth.

The familiar Psalm 23 also reveals a blessing connected with water as the psalmist recognizes the gifts of "green pastures" and "still waters."[74] The centrality and abundance of water is noted as one of the distinguishing features of this particular Psalm. At various places throughout the Psalms blessing and salvation are expressed in the

---

[72] Psalm 104; see also "Psalm 104: A Celebration of Vanua," in *Earth Story of the Psalms and Prophets*, Vanua is a Fijian word for the land; see also "The Survival of Earth: An African Reading of Psalm 104," in the same book.

[73] See Psalm 104

[74] Psalm 23; see also *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, 2565; *Anchor Bible: Psalms 1-50,* 146 which also details the centrality and abundance of water as key to this passage.

contrasting imagery for fertile ground and the wilderness.[75] The blessing of God is revealed in Psalm 1 when "happy are those who are like trees planted by streams of water."[76] This entire Psalm has been referred to as a Psalm of trust and confidence in God. This trust seems palpable in the calm and tranquil descriptions attributed to water.[77]

Water as a Conduit for God's Presence

In many ways this final theme encapsulates the previous three themes. Water, understood biblically, is a conduit for God's actions, presence, and proximity to the Earth. Whether through the creative, destructive, or sustaining capabilities of water, the biblical authors depict a sensibility for the presence of God in water. At times God's presence in the water reveals mystery and chaos, while at other times it is a presence encountered by still and peaceful waters.[78] This particular theme of chaos is already noted in Genesis 1 where the waters of the deep are a location of chaos. The waters of the flood similarly represent chaos as the waters "swelled so mightily" that they reached "above the mountains covering them fifteen cubits deep."[79] It is this chaotic water force that destroyed all the flesh of the earth (save Noah and the members of the ark.)

God's presence and power in nature is beyond human understanding, a true mystery. This presence is beyond human control and might even manifest as chaos to

---

[75] *Interpreters Dictionary of the Bible*, 807.

[76] Psalm 1; see also *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Bible*, 2566.

[77] *Anchor Bible: Psalms 1-50*, 144.

[78] Psalm 23

[79] Gen 7:19

human experience. Yet experiencing God in nature can also represent some of the most intimate experiences of God – in sustaining all life. Of note is Psalm 65 where the psalmist describes God as "roaring in the seas and waves." The flourishing of the Earth is accounted for by God's watering the land which leads to fertility. The meadows drip, and showers bless young sprouts. The earth in this Psalm is wet from the presence of God. There is a bounty on the Earth and the existence of water accomplishes a great part of this.[80] The psalmist sings praise for the Lord who rules "the raging of the sea," and stills the waves.[81] This presence of God is continually seen in the movement and control of water. God is often the one who saves people from the chaotic force of water. In Psalm 107, when people "cried to the Lord in their trouble," God hushed the storm and brought people to safety.[82] And ultimately the Psalms reflect the presence of God in all of the earth, even the water. The Psalmist in 139 wonders "where can I go from your sprit?" since "at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me?"[83]

The authors of Genesis and Psalms continually attempt to reveal a people's dependence upon water, a people's reverence for the power and knowledge of the danger associated with water, and finally the relationship with God that at times was mediated through the waters. The biblical stories of water reveal how significant water is for

---

[80] See *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 97, on the sea and the waves being calmed and silenced by Yahweh.

[81] Psalm 89

[82] Psalm 107: 28-30

[83] Psalm 139: 7-9

creation. The Bible affirms the sacred role that water plays in the world and chronicles the chaotic force of water. Biblical stories affirm that water is a good created for the flourishing of all creation. Genesis affirms that water is a crucial life-sustaining resource. The Psalms affirm water is a blessing, worthy of receiving appreciation and respect. Next, I use these biblical themes of water to make certain ethical recommendations, particularly the worldview they point to. I also draw out implications for honoring water as both sacred and chaotic in the world today. It is the biblical view of water that creates a value system helpful in critiquing the distorted value of water that the commodity view maintains.

Ethical Implications: The Biblical View of Water vs. the Commodity View

In this section I argue that the biblical worldview for water is important for the world today and necessary to critique practices emergent from the commodification of water. I support my argument by using the biblical themes in the previous section to respond to the four practices of commodification of water addressed in chapter one. I use the biblical value of water to critique privatization; after all, can anyone own the presence of God manifest in water? The anthropology and cosmology, the particular way the biblical stories describe humanity and the cosmos, point to a particular worldview – one that honors the creative force of water. Water creates life, sustains the Earth processes, and reveals God's presence. Water appreciated this way belongs to the Earth, not to private corporations and individuals seeking to make a profit.

Next, I look to water as a destructive and chaotic force as a way to critique water as a commodity. I use the biblical description of water as chaos to argue that dams, an

outcome of viewing water as a commodity where human ingenuity tries to tame or harness chaos, further disrupts the natural flow and habitat for water, wreaking global havoc. Third, the quality of water as that which sustains all life, calls attention to the good of water for all of the Earth. When water is viewed as a commodity, and not as a life-source, pollution increases. When water is polluted, marginalized people and ecosystems suffer. Finally, and most importantly, water represents God's presence. The sacred value of water, as that which is intimately connected to God, critiques any view of water that values it only for its ability to be bottled and sold. Water should not be bottled without attention to the global community and the sustainable practices so crucial for a healthy future. Genesis and Psalms reveal a story of water within an integrated worldview which understands water in its fullest capacity, as that which has import for the earth and all living beings. The commodity story of water embraces a fragmented picture which removes water from its intimacy with the Earth and all living creatures. Each biblical theme is developed in this section to reveal its ethical implications: water cannot be privatized, diverted, polluted, or viewed as only valuable in a bottle.

Water as a Creative Force and Privatization

It is apparent through various commentaries and historical interpretations of the Bible that the biblical region was arid, water was scarce, and life was fragile because of the scarcity of water.[84] The narratives of the Bible show that people often lived through

[84] See *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit: Biblical Ethics and Climate Change; Landscape, Nature and Man in the Bible: Sites and Events in the Old Testament* (Israel: Carta, Jerusalem, 2003), *Imagery and Imagination in Biblical Literature; Keeping God's Earth; Troubled Waters.*

or heard recent stories of terrible storms, floods, and droughts. If the biblical people had not lived through such a catastrophe, certainly there would be one in recent memory. The connection that people experienced with the natural world is depicted in a way that reflects an appreciation for creation, God's presence in the world, and the power that resides within the elements of the created world.[85] The Bible can help articulate a theology of water, one that reveals the intersection of the sacred journey of a people with their lived experience of water.[86] The biblical stories reveal a people that lived aware of the delicate relationship they experienced with water, where the Israelite could not take water for granted and therefore developed into "an inquisitive and inventive" people able to live with little water but constantly finding creative ways to secure appropriate amounts of water for survival.[87] To get a better understanding of this worldview I examine the theological anthropology and cosmology operative in the Genesis creation narratives. These affirm that the creative force of water is essential for all living beings and the Earth, thus it is not something that can be privatized and owned by a select few. A brief excursion in the operative anthropology and cosmology also bears fruit when addressing ethical uses of all Earth's resources especially water.

---

[85] See Michael Himes and Kenneth Himes, **"**The Sacrament of Creation: Toward an Environmental Theology," in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology* ed. Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre, 271 where they argue that the relational dimension of the Jewish-Christian heritage must replace the individual worldview so prevalent today. They discuss how relationships were fundamental to the Genesis narratives of how humans understand themselves in the midst of creation.

[86] Elaine Glaci Neuenfeldt, "Caminhada: A Pligramage with Land, Water and the Bible," *In God, Creation and Climate Change*, ed. Karen L. Bloomquist (Geneva: Switzerland: Lutheran University Press, 2009), 98.

[87] See Menahe Har-El, "Water Resources and Installations," in *Landscape Nature and Man in the Bible: Sites and Events in the Old Testament* (Israel: Carta, Jerusalem , 2003), 47-74.

Cosmology and Anthropology

The Genesis narrative shows two quite different theological anthropologies. The creative force of water is approached differently depending on the operative anthropology. In particular, the Genesis creation narratives are useful in revealing a panoramic vision; their status as sacred myth gives them a sweeping perspective and all-encompassing impact on humanity's self-understanding in relationship with the rest of creation. Michael Himes and Kenneth Himes stress the importance of focusing on the relational elements of these creation accounts, relationships that extend beyond just humans, but also between humans and nonhumans.[88] I look to Genesis here, and in particular how humanity relates to the Earth, to ground my arguments for water justice which affirms water as more than just a commodity, but as a creative force that transcends the functions of the market.

The priestly story of creation in Genesis 1 reveals a God who brings peaceful order to chaos. The story begins with a formless wasteland and watery chaos. All of this builds up to the creation of humanity in the divine image and likeness, and God gives humanity the dual responsibility of having "dominion" over the earth and its creatures and being fruitful and multiplying. Much has been written about dominion and what it means in terms of the human beings relationship with the world. Scholars argue that we have misunderstood the way the term dominion works in the text since its proper meaning is "to be stewards, guardians, caretakers who are answerable to God for the way

[88] Michael Himes and Kenneth Himes, **"**The Sacrament of Creation: Toward an Environmental Theology," in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, 274.

in which they use His world."[89] Furthermore, dominion can imply both responsibility and relationship, so that humans do not just use the Earth, but rather "make a relationship with it" and keep it in "good repair and ready for the next generation."[90] Perhaps Christians have "mistakenly thought that God, in giving us 'dominion,' was giving us permission to waste and destroy anything we pleased."[91] Even in light of this positive interpretation of the meaning of the word 'dominion,' the term has been used time and time again to justify a certain attitude regarding how humanity might interact with the creation.[92] The Judeo-Christian tradition pairs this Genesis 1 story, where the human is given dominion over nature and prioritized as a part of creation, with the Yahwist creation myth, and we might miss a clarifying point if we do not consider the anthropology of Genesis 2.[93]

---

[89] John Hargreaves, *A Guide to Genesis: New Edition* (London: SPCK, 1998), 12; see also Anderson, "Creation and Ecology" in *Creation in the Old Testament*, 163.

[90] Ibid., 15. Hargreaves gives two examples of how to understand dominion: "when we cut down a tree, we need to plant another (or two more) in its place so the land does not become a desert; when we catch fish, we need to limit the size of the catch so that enough fish remain to breed in the future," 13. Bernhard Anderson also makes the argument that the dominion concept refers to a "call to responsibility" where human beings are "entitled to manage the Creator's earthly estate." See also "Creation and Ecology" in *Creation in the Old Testament*, 163.

[91] Ibid., 15.

[92] For more on the scholarship around "steward" verses "domination" and the various interpretations of the two creation stories in Genesis, see for example: Petty, *A Faith that Loves the Earth*, 6-10; Gene McAfee, "Ecology and Biblical Studies" in *Theology for an Earth Community: A Field Guide*, ed. Dieter T. Hessel (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996); Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power and Promise*, especially Chapter One: Shifting the Blame, and Jay B. McDaniel, *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue*, especially Chapter 4: Whose Story Shall We Tell, and Chapter 5: And God So Loved the Planet.

[93] Alejandro Garcia-Rivera, *The Garden of God: A Theological Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 75.

The Yahwist account begins with the garden, and God creates humanity because someone is needed to cultivate this garden (Gen 2:15). Seemingly this Yahwist account offers a "more modest view of the human."[94] Whereas the previous Genesis story is attributed to a Priestly author, the Gen 2-3 account is often connected with an agricultural perspective, from a community who lived closely with the land. A vastly different understanding of human anthropology, then, emerges from the two stories.[95] The anthropomorphic God fashions the first "earth creature" (the meaning of the Hebrew term *'adam*) with the dirt of the earth and animates the creature with the divine breath.[96] This ancient story, the older of the two stories of creation, promotes a keen awareness that humanity springs from the earth itself. This account of creation presents an understanding of humanity as a part of the entire web of creation, with the responsibility to care for the natural world which sustains it, as evidenced by the human's duties to cultivate the garden and to name the other animals God creates.[97] Alejandro Garcia-Rivera argues that the difference between the two accounts of creation display "the nature of human

---

[94] Theodore Hiebert, "The Human Vocation: Origins and Transformations in the Christian Traditions" in *Christianity and Ecology*, 141.

[95] Hiebert's article offers a helpful interpretation of the two Genesis stories and how crucial it is to place them together to get a fuller picture of human anthropology. Hiebert also looks to strands within Christianity that have taken hold of the different accounts in a helpful analysis to underscore how different interpretations have circulated throughout Christianity.

[96] For more on this account see Bernhard Anderson, *The Beginning of History: Genesis* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1963), 49; French, "Chaos and Creation," 12; Hargreaves, *A Guide to Genesis*; Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power, and Promise*; Edmund Hill, *Being Human: A Biblical Perspective* (London: G. Chapman, 1984).

[97] See Anne Clifford, "Foundations for a Catholic Ecological Theology of God" in *And God Saw That it was Good,* where she argues that naming the animals does not imply dominion over them, but rather is a means to "establish relationships with other creatures and God," 25.

engagement with the cosmos…this curious mix of glory and struggle points to a great mystery not only about our humanity but also about our cosmos."[98] Finally, the Genesis 2 account highlights that being human means being in relationship, for God notices that the *'adam* is lonely. Creation is not "complete" until the *'adam* is essentially split into two "earth creatures."[99]

The commodification of water, and the practices that accompany it, stem from a view associated with the human tendency to dominate nature, as scholars for centuries interpreted the texts in Genesis 1 to support, a belief that the resources of the earth are for the good of humanity only.[100] While both Genesis creation accounts appreciate the centrality of water, Genesis 2 presses harder upon a grander appreciation for the cosmos, the entire Earth community and the place of humanity within that web of creation. It is in this material in the second creation account narrating the intricate relationships between humanity, God, and creation that I find useful ideas about a worldview which honors water and values it for more that its worth as a profit-producing good. I see in the Yahwist creation account an alternative worldview that can confront the commodification paradigm leading to the ecological and social injustices associated with the water

---

[98] Garcia-Rivera, *Garden of God*, 75.

[99] See Fewell and Gunn, *Gender, Power and Promise*, 25-30; Hargreaves, *A Guide to Genesis*, he argues that this verse (Gen 2:22) shows that "the meaning here is that women are of the same nature as men. They do not mean that women are inferior to men or of less value," 29.

[100] See Lynn White article and the resulting debate that this set off noted in earlier footnote # 16; in many ways White's critiques of Christianity towards a hostile response toward nature did a great deal to provoke and focus the attention of many Christian ecological scholars, both negatively and positively on the Christian doctrine of creation, and in particular the Genesis texts, for more see: Ken Gnanakan, *God's World: A Theology of the Environment*, 18.

crisis.[101] This account foregrounds humanity's utter dependence on the earth for survival.[102] However, I do not wish to dispose of the ecological possibilities found in Genesis 1, as I use the very characteristic of water as chaotic developed there to critique the commodification of water in the next section.

It has been argued that Genesis 1 depicts a narrative about the creation of the universe, a more heaven-centered creation account, while Genesis 2 presents the origin of life on Earth, thus a more earth-centered creation account.[103]As a result scholars often look to Genesis 2 in order to ground more themes for ecological justice based on the modest approach to human beings living on the Earth.[104] The agricultural community implied in Genesis 2 is arguably a helpful image to return to in our modern world today. Heibert claims that there are significant "cogent ecological reasons for rescuing the image of the small farmer," since it may help to understand the idea of simplicity "into the self-concept of modern culture."[105] This image of the 'small farmer' is in many ways lost on modern society today, yet it is that 'small farmer' who lives with a particular reverence for the land and an attention to a good such a water, in both its creative and destructive

---

[101] French, in "Chaos and Creation" argues that Chapter 2 of Genesis presents an "intimate earth-human connection" which is "reinforced when we are told that even the ground is cursed into barrenness because of Adam and Eve's sin (3:17)," 12. It is this human-earth connection that I draw on throughout this project in arguing for water justice.

[102] Heibert, *The Yahwist Landscape*, 143.

[103] E.A. Speiser, *The Anchor Bible: Genesis*, (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1964), 19; See also *Spirit and Nature*, 34.

[104] Craven and Kraska, "The Legacy of Creation," in *Spirit and Nature*, 35.

[105] Heibert, *The Yahwist Landscape*, 147.

capacities, that can inform a worldview today.[106]

Valuing water according the Genesis 2 account honors the creative force of water and places the human in a humble relationship with the Earth. This Genesis 2 account is helpful in critiquing the privatization of water. Privatization disrupts the view emphasized in Genesis 2, where water is a created good of the Earth, a resource replete with the splendor of God for humanity, all living beings and the entire cosmos. Thus, water is not something that can be owned by any one individual. The privatization of water and commodification of Earth's resources represents a worldview where humanity dominates nature, controls water, sells water for profit, and fails to honor the role of water in the creation and sustenance of the Earth. The intimate connection humanity expressed with the land in Genesis 2 seems to be lost when earth's resources are commodified. Knowledge of the rivers, the value of the soil and the land, and an experience of intimacy with God through nature presents an alternate view to valuing earth's resources as commodities.

This is where the ethics of water from a biblically informed worldview begins. It is an ethics which honors water in its natural setting and affirms the goodness therein. It is an ethics that affirms the creative elements of water. It is an ethics that values water as a sacramental resource, a sacred good, and an element of nature, not an ethics that supports water as only a commodity. This ethics appreciates the importance of water for

[106] Ibid., Heibert goes on to claim that scholars are rehabilitating this idea of the small farmer today in light of certain truths: "agriculture is the major mode in which humans interact with the environment and the ultimate basis for human survival, and second, the modern industrial agriculture is not working – it is unacceptably destructive to the environment and it is unsustainable," 148.

all life forms. Larry Rasmussen, an environmental theologian, argues that what is needed for water today is an "ethical reorientation," claiming that water is an object of "awe and not *only* an object of engineering; it is a medium of the mystical and not *only* a resource for a world of our making."[107] Water has become a "resource and commodity in the service of the irrational exuberance of the post-1950 global economy." The biblical stories of Genesis and Psalms, I argue, counter this view and present an ethical description of water thick enough to begin to reorient humanity's relationship with water.[108] Water cannot be privatized and viewed only through the lens of a commodity if the sweeping narratives and Genesis and the Psalms are accounted for and allowed to form the moral and ecologically just imaginations of Christians.

Humility and Diversion

Water is chaotic. Water is untamable. Water truly represents the divine and a force that is too great for the human to conquer. These are themes found in scripture, but also in many other religious traditions.[109] The biblical authors conveyed the chaotic power of nature and the resulting respect this engendered from humanity. This, I argue, can ground a more accurate appreciation of and humility before water today, and a result curtail some of the excessive efforts to divert, dam, and alter the natural flow of water. Chaos cannot be tamed and any attempt to control chaos has usually been problematic at

[107] Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith*, 283.

[108] Ibid., 283.

[109] Ibid., 276-278.

best.

Catherine Keller, an ecofeminist scholar, offers an insightful look at the meaning of the chaos of the sea and waters found in scripture. She wonders whether some of the chaotic references to water which have impacted the overall understanding of the value of water "have some bearing on global indifference to the death of the oceans?"[110] Keller refers to Genesis 1 as a "battle against the chaos," which is represented in the waters. She also connects this evil association with the sea with a passage from Job when he is evoking the chaos of the sea.[111] Perhaps the current damage to the sea is the "metaphor and effect of the damage to our culture's capacity to think, feel, and act deeply."[112] Keller's analysis of the chaos motif, along with the way chaos is so often associated with evil within the Christian tradition in many ways, gets to her point that it is often the lack of an appreciation for chaos which truly is the problem. It is a narrow interpretation of this passage in Genesis 1 which I am, along with Keller, arguing against. Keller affirms that chaos can often be connected with the "intermediate, the transitional, the wild," all

---

[110] Catherine Keller, "No More See: The Lost Chaos of the Eschaton," in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*,185-198, also see the response to Keller's article by Mary Ann Hinsdale, 199-203, who also argues that the negative chaos tradition which has allowed the sea to be seen as evil intensifies the view of the sea as a sewer for humanity. This is terribly tragic given the water crisis today. See also Keller, *The Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming (*New York: Routledge, 2003).

[111] Keller, "No More Sea," 189, and see Job 3:3, 8; 26, Keller presents a helpful interpretation of Job suggesting an important appreciation not so much for human vulnerability but for the delusions of human power; see also Dianne Bergant, "Bible's Wisdom" in *God, Creation, and Climate Change: A Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis* Richard W. Miller, ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010), 40. Here Bergant also argues that Job encounters the majesty of God and recognizes that human history unfolds against the backdrop of the broader context of the natural world. Job's story is not just about human suffering, but the entire cosmos and the unfolding drama therein. See also "Be This Fish: A Theology of Creation out of Chaos" in *Water - Word and World: Theology for Christian Ministry* Volume 32, No. 1, Winter, 2012.

[112] Keller, 190.

things that might be needed today to ecologize our living.[113] Ecology is not about order, but rather nature.[114] Thus Keller turns the chaotic force that is ordered in Genesis 1 upside down. Arguing that perhaps part of the problem is the human need to put order where there is chaos – in essence to commodify, to divert, or to control the uncertainty of water. Rather, there must be some recognition of the true nature of water that in reality human beings can never fully control. The humility that comprises the ethics of how to live in right relationship with water then involves a sense of honesty and courage, naming harmful water practices and a renewed integrity to "name, resist, and oppose the powers and systems that violate earth and people."[115]

The commodification of water creates a belief that human ingenuity can conquer nature. What is lost in this belief, however, is the reminder that water, a force of nature, is far bigger than humanity and as a result is worthy of a certain level of respect and reverence. Within this authentic appreciation for water there is a corresponding humility. This humility that I am suggesting presents a critique of practices which lead to the construction of large dams and other divertive mechanisms. Like the storm I mentioned at the opening of this chapter, Hurricane Ike revealed one such recent example of the power of water. Similarly, and in line with this theme of human engineering trying to control water is evidence in the examples of Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Sandy. The

---

[113] Ibid., 196.

[114] Ibid., 193.

[115] William E. Gibson, "Concluding Considerations, Continuing Journey," in *Eco-Justice: The Unfinished Journey*, ed. William E. Gibson (New York: State University of New York Press, 2004), 318.

destruction and devastation left in the wake of Katrina results from not only a massive storm, but also the failed levee system that was no longer able to withstand the power of water. Scientists knew the levees were in need of repair and that the wetlands surrounding New Orleans were disappearing, two factors which made the catastrophic storm even more problematic for the region.[116] I mention Katrina here since it is an example of the chaotic force of water (in a massive hurricane) meeting the human ingenuity to try and alter the course of water (levee system) which led to devastating results. Humans will continually need to alter the flow of water for a variety of reasons, but perhaps there needs to be a greater respect for the very nature of water which we continually harness for power, the chaotic force.

Damming and diverting water is a practice which leads to the 'death of the oceans' and harms all living creatures and systems on the earth. What is needed today is a reverence for this chaotic nature of water and openness to working in harmony with water instead of diverting it and ultimately trying to control water. Recognizing the chaotic and mysterious nature of water may indeed be what calls attention to the humble existence humanity has in relationship to water. Additionally, this recognition reveals the corresponding need to treat water with a respect that honors its chaos, power and true nature. Recognizing the chaos motif, operative in Scripture, and applied to the current water crisis by Keller, is something that can move humanity to treat water as it is: the life-force of all earth; instead of diverting it.

The biblical value of water as chaotic must be expanded to critique to social

[116] See *Scientific American Magazine*, and PBS Newshour, August 31, 2005.

injustices that surround the harm resulting from altering the flow of water. The commodity view of water fails to represent the overall value of water for the good of all life on Earth. The narratives of Genesis and Psalms embrace and represent a more honest and relevant appreciation for water. Water is not something that can be diverted for the good of a select few individuals or communities to the great detriment of the masses. No, water, as representative of the chaotic element of creation, must be safeguarded. Water should be protected which leads to check and balances on humanity's immediate desire for power, profit, and control when managing water.

Clean Water as a Source for Life

Genesis and Psalms affirm that water is a good necessary for sustaining and nourishing life. Something that sustains life should be protected and kept free of pollution and waste. The flourishing and health of water corresponds to the flourishing and health of life. Rasmussen argues that the term "Earth" is actually a misnomer, and "Planet Water" would be more apt description of our environment.[117] Put succinctly he claims that "planetary water health is primary, human health is derivative: no blue, no green; no green, no us."[118] Passages from both Genesis and the Psalms reveal that water is connected with God's 'green pastures', covers the land like a 'garment,' and is filled with 'countless creatures.'[119] Water is life. Commodious uses of water fail to recognize this.

---

[117] Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith*, 274.

[118] Ibid., 280.

[119] See Psalms 23 and 104

Practices which harm water and pollute water diminish the life-sustaining functions connected with water. Viewing water as a commodity increases pollution, since people fail to honor the true nature of water and treat it as a thing which can be used, wasted and destroyed without concern for its overall value.[120]

Between now and 2050, the human population is expected to grow from 6.2 billion to 9.2 billion, meaning that even more pollution will end up in our rivers, lakes, streams, and even our rain water.[121] People all over the world dump waste in rivers and lakes, sometimes without a choice, without thinking of the consequences. As more people create more waste, our water quality will continue to diminish. Pollution moves between rivers, lakes, and oceans and ends up in our tap water. It is pollution, mainly runoff from sewage and chemicals, which causes forty percent of the rivers and streams in the U.S. to become unusable. These waterways are too dangerous for swimming, fishing and drinking.[122] Lake Victoria in Tanzania is one of the thousands of lakes that remain in distress. When I visited in 2002, I was warned by many people to stay far away from the lake. People cautioned that even getting close to the lake could make you sick. Despite this, the local Tanzanians swam, bathed, and drank from the water.

---

[120] There are numerous places to turn to look to how modern industries are increases pollution at rapid pace. Of note in my argument are: Fred Powledge, *Water: The Nature, Uses, and Future of Our Most Precious and Abused Resource*; Peter Rogers and Susan Leal, *Running Out of Water: The Looming Crisis and Solutions to Conserve Our Most Precious Resource*; Water in Crisis: A Guide to the World's Fresh Water Resources, ed. Peter Gleick; and *Water, Place, and Equity*, ed by John M. Whiteley, Helen Ingram, and Richard Warren Perry.

[121] See UN Reports: http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=45165#.Uv_YaoeYbIU; see also Maude Barlow and Tony Clark, *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (New York: New Press, 2002), 6-8.

[122] Maude Barlow and Tony Clark, *Blue Gold,* 28.

Pollution of waterways is no longer an isolated problem; rather, waterways are being polluted at rates which lead to 'totality,' meaning polluted waterways are becoming more common than unpolluted ones.[123] Sadly, today the consumer must consider that water might be polluted, rather than safe to drink.[124] Alerting people and educating people about the reality of water and the need for a corresponding reverence and respect may indeed be one of the first steps to increasing access to safe, clear, and pristine water. Connecting the need and importance for pollution-free waterways with the biblical appreciation for the life-sustaining capability of water seems an adequate place to start altering habits which destroy the integrity of water.

Water as Sacred and Bottled Water

In the Bible, water is celebrated as a blessing, a sacred gift from God, and an integral part of the land that must be respected. Like the story at the opening of this chapter, there are different ways to approach water. Water from a stream presents the sacred association with water found throughout scripture. On the other hand, water in a bottle is a commodity, something that is exchangeable, replaceable, and disconnected from the sacred. Rasmussen claims that when water is separated from its place in nature and only understood as a commodity then "water's wonder is lost on us for the life it births, brings, and sustains."[125] Commodities, especially in the form of bottled water, fail

[123] Patrick J. Sullivan, Franklin J Agardy, and James J.J. Clark, *The Environmental Science of Drinking Water*, (Burlington, MA: Elseview Butterworth-Heinemann, 2005), 83.

[124] Ibid., 93.

[125] Rasmussen, *Earth Honoring Faith*, 270.

to represent the wonder and awe which water truly deserves.[126] The Bible maintains that water brings people together, as in the case of various biblical examples of companionship established at wells.[127]

The history of how creation, nature, and God's presence therein has been interpreted within the Christian tradition has been appropriately summarized by Elizabeth Johnson in an article, "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition." Johnson argues that the first fifteen hundred years of Christianity found the natural world to be "pervasively and comfortably present."[128] Not only was the natural world present, it was "depicted as God's good creation and covenant partner," and it "shares in the blessings of the human covenant as well as in judgment when the covenant is broken."[129] These fifteen hundred years of Christianity show theology dealing with God, humanity, and creation in "an ordered harmony."[130] The drastic change between the first fifteen hundred years and the present understanding of God and nature, Johnson argues, emerged with the advance of modernity, thus the 'losing' of nature. Nature in modernity was seen as

---

[126] Ibid., 270.

[127] See 270-271 where Rasmussen discusses the biblical story of Rebecca at the well, which he argues illumines our "real world loss of manifold engagement," for when Rebecca went to the well she was given not only "living water, but also companionship." This is drastically different than a woman standing alone in from of a sink or purchasing water at a supermarket. There is a unique approach to how things are viewed in our world today. 'Company' Rasmussen argues is seemingly the contrasting term to 'commodity."

[128] Elizabeth Johnson, "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition" in *Christianity and Ecology*, 5.

[129] Ibid., 5.

[130] Ibid., 7.

separate from the drama of salvation and even the "symbol of what humans beings are rescued *from*."[131]

Modern industry and practices of the commodification of water have failed to see the intricate dynamics, addressed in the Bible, for the good of water for sustaining all creation. Modern technologies bottle, transport, and profit from the sale of water. Again, I am not critiquing modern technologies as all bad, but rather saying that these technologies have shifted the way humans interact with a natural substance such as water. This retrieval of an appreciation for an ecological harmony seems in many ways one of the most valuable points the Bible might offer in terms of an appropriate value for water. Recognizing the presence of God in water may halt or slow the rampant use of bottled water, especially in places equipped with safe tap water

For the Israelites the land not only supported their existence, but it also represented the cornerstone of their relationship with God.[132] Water was an integral part of the land which similarly represents a conduit for relating to God. The Earth, throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, is seen as the creation of God, not the mere property of the people; that fact significantly impacted the way people cared for and related to the land. This land, then, became the place where justice and righteousness were carried out between human beings.[133] Concepts such as the Jubilee year and the Sabbatical year

---

[131] Ibid., 10.

[132] Ibid., 4.

[133] Ibid., 5. See also Walter Brueggeman, *The Land: Place as Gift, Challenge, and Promise in Biblical Faith: Second Edition* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2002).

represented the cultivation of the land in a way that respected the integrity of the land and did not entirely exhaust the resources of the earth. [134] The intricate web of life that existed on the land established a means of communication between the people of Israel and God; further, this web connected God, nature, humanity and history.[135] Resources were not viewed as things which could be exhausted or used recklessly. Land and the water are viewed as blessings in the Bible; they are parts of creation intended to sustain all life forms, not just those with the means to afford it, or who live in part of the world where access to resources comes without great strain.[136]

---

[134] Frederick G Levine, "Earthly Offerings: Sacrifice and the Land in Ancient Israel and Early Christianity" in *Embracing Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology*, 2-5.

[135] Ibid., 9. See also Wendell Berry, *Gift of Good Land: Further Essays Cultural and Agricultural. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 1981.*, William French, "Chaos and Cosmos", *The Bible Today* 33:1(January 1995): 9-15 and "Soil and Salvation: Theological Anthropology Ecologically Informed." *The Whole and Divided Self*, ed. John McCarthy (New York: Crossroad, 1997), 158-181, Ken Gnanakan, *God's World: Biblical Insights for a Theology of the Environment.* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1999).

[136] Johnson is joined by a host of scholars how are reading the texts attuned to the goodness of the natural world. These scholars give weight to a biblical ethic for water, or at the very least a critique of the strict lens for valuing water as a commodity. Walter Burghardt, along with James Nash and Jame Schaffer, are among those who take this stance. These voices point to justice in the Bible as something that extends beyond human relationships and enters the realm of non-human creation, and a resource such as water, as well. Burghardt states that a steward manages something that belongs to another, and in this understanding it is clearly irresponsible and even unethical to damage or to cause harm to that which you are managing, here holding up the different interpretations of the Genesis stories. Rather, "a steward cares, is concerned, at times agonizes…stewards may not plunder or waste; they are responsible, can be called to account for their stewardship," See Walter Burghardt, *Justice: A Global Adventure* (New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 17; Opting for a view of a steward as one who is united with creation, over and against the concept of domination over the earth, Burghardt claims that justice exists when human beings are in right relationship with the earth. Nash and Schaffer extend the interpretations of the Bible beyond just their import for human beings and argue that nature is an important category as well. Nash applies an ethic of love rooted in the Christian tradition to ecological issues. Along with this love comes the resulting response to become a good neighbor to creation, and to act with ideals such as reconciliation, communion, community, and harmony in mind, see *Loving Nature*, 145; like Nash, Schaefer develops the idea of loving the earth as it includes a kinship for all of creation and an innate care for God's creatures. Based on the idea that God has created the earth, humanity's only response to this gift should be care and reverence, Jame Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic & Medieval Concepts* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 7-8; It is ideas such as these that cash out in a helpful biblical appreciation for water. Recognizing that water is a created good worthy of care and reverence and that it is

The increase of commodification practices fails to account for God's presence in and around water. What does this value of water as representative of God mean for an ethics of water? First, it honors water as a good of the earth, and not just something that is used by human beings, God's role in the salvation history of the earth is crucial here. The biblical affirmation that God's presence is manifest in water can minimize the harm and failure to appreciate water. This respect for God in water would place restrictions on the overuse of water sources without a chance to naturally replenish themselves.[137] This idea of water as sacred cashes out in respecting water in its natural setting and working to find ways to use water that are more modest and not as wasteful as the commodity approach has allowed consumers to be.

Conclusion

Scripture depicts water as a foundational building block of creation. Biblical authors recognize water as a blessing which is reverenced for its life-sustaining qualities. Simultaneously, many stories reveal water as a destructive force respected for the power of nature and the belief of God's presence in that natural setting. Water throughout scripture is described as something that is powerful, awe-inspiring, and dynamic; water is

---

proper for human's to treat natural resources as a neighbor. Similarly scholars like Gene McAfee and Carol Robb also interpret the importance of the natural world in the Bible and use it to address ecological concerns of the present day. Gene McAfee argues that the kingdom of God not only points to social reversals, but also establishes "an ecological concept" because salvation includes of all creation, moving toward a "renewal of all creation." Robb reads Jesus' parables as stories addressed to a community for whom "the land was a special link to their relationship with God." Further, she interprets the kingdom of God as "a historical project concerned about the affairs of nature." For more see: Gene McAfee, "Ecology and Biblical Studies" in *Theology for an Earth Community*, 40; and Carol Robb, *Sun, Wind, Soil, Spirit*, 118.

[137] Dieter Hessel, "The Church's Eco-Justice Journey," in *Eco- justice – The Unfinished Journey*, 262.

an essential element of nature, in contrast to the view today which imparts human power over water and continually removes water from its natural setting. In many instances humans today try to control water through practices discussed in the previous chapter. The biblical narratives present the story of water where humans live in a more humble relationship with all of nature and in particular water. Recent scholarship which prioritizes the role of nature in the Bible is helpful in ushering a move away from an anthropocentric worldview toward a more cosmocentric appreciation of the universe. This emphasis has import for water as well. The stories of the Bible, then, become a place to affirm the role of the human in the entire cosmos, not as a being to manipulate, dominate, and alter the natural world. Rather, they suggest a way to live responsibly within an intricate web of human and nonhuman life. Thus the Bible is a resource in critiquing the commodification of water as a strictly human centered practice. Scripture affirms that water has a value beyond just that which humans ascribe to it: a value for the entire creation.

Ethical implications abound from a scriptural read of the story of water. Water in Genesis and Psalms is creative, destructive, nourishing and a symbol for God which can critique the privatization, pollution, diversion and bottling practices today. Constantly severing water from its sacred place in nature, the consumer approach to water has failed to honor water's story in its complexity. Water has become "commodious," a convenient time-saving item – especially in the case of bottled water, but this very idea has served to disrupt the human relationship with the sacred mediated through water. Finally, water as chaotic is truly beyond human conquest. Water, depicted in the story of the flood, has the

power to completely destroy life on Earth as we know it. Hagar's story in Genesis, in which a well is found at a life threatening moment, shows how water is the image through which God saves. It is the image that points to human dependence on God, it reminds humanity that we are not self-sufficient and that we do not possess water. Rather, we are possessed by God through our dependence on God's gifts, such as water. These are some of the ethical ideas from the biblical story of water; I turn now to the tradition of Catholic thought which also has key components necessary for a more nuanced critique of the commodification of water.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PLANETARY COMMON GOOD:

APPLYING CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING TO THE

COMMODIFICATION OF WATER

> It is necessary to state once more the characteristic principle of Christian social doctrine: the goods of this world are originally meant for all.[1]

> Science, unaided, does not teach us what we most need to know about nature: *how to value it…*Religious ethicists can, with considerable plausibility, make the claim that neither sustainable development, nor conservation, nor a sustainable biosphere, nor any other harmony between humans and nature can be gained until persons learn to use the Earth both justly and charitably.[2]

My account of the value of water continues in this chapter, now addressed through the lens of Catholic social teaching and the rich tradition represented there. Here I focus on the common good, one of the central tenets of this heritage. I am especially interested in the concept of water as a good required by all and the imperative that water be accessible for all creatures. The commodification of water assumes that humanity owns and controls water. The biblical view counters this commodification supporting the notion that humanity does not possess water, but rather is wholly dependent on water;

---

[1] *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, #42

[2] Holmes Rolston, III, "Saving Creation: Faith Shaping Environmental Policy," in *Harvard Law and Policy Review*, no. 121, (2010), 120 -122, http://ecojusticenow.org/resources/Eco-Justice-Ethics/HLPR-Saving-Creation.pdf, accessed September 3, 2013.

humanity is a humble force in the grand scheme of God's creation. The ideas presented in Catholic social teaching further critique the commodification of water, instructing that water is a component of the common good and as a result should be safeguarded for all.

Water supports communities. This is easier to see in societies in which water is only accessible from a single, communal point. Literature, whether in the Bible or elsewhere, abounds with significant encounters of people around wells, watering holes, and other places where they come to secure their daily need for water. I experienced these encounters regularly during my time in the Marshall Islands. Drawing water from the catchment was an opportunity to socialize. People gathered together regularly and consistently to draw water for the day; they would fill buckets to provide water for drinking, cooking, cleaning, and whatever else the day's needs entailed. In the evening, women would gather at the catchment to get water for bathing and for any other nightly needs. As an outsider, my actions were watched a little more closely than my Marshallese companions, and I would be surrounded by around 10 people whenever I went to draw water. The family I stayed with would venture over to see what I was doing, our neighbors would come to see if I needed help or if our catchment had enough water, and people passing by on bikes would stop upon seeing me to start a conversation about the rain, the weather – anything about water. Water's source was a communal gathering spot. I have experienced similar moments in places like Tanzania and Nicaragua. Water is a shared resource; the responsibility to secure it was a mutually held task, revealing the concrete nature of the communal context of water. Water brings people together. Water shared, co-managed, and protected expresses community.

Here in Chicago, I am afforded the luxury of going to my sink, my bath, or my toilet and trusting that water will be there. I do not need to consult other people for help in provisioning water for the day. No one is concerned with what I am about to do with the water or if my well-being as connected to my need for water is met. Water is experienced as a private good in most of the developed world.

As convenient as this accessibility of water is for me, it severs me from the sociality of water.[3] Water exists in the world as a social good, yet many categorize it as a private good. The Marshall Islanders view water in the catchment as a public, communal good, a condition arguably made easier by the fact it derives from a public source. The water running through a tap in Chicago is perceived as a private good.[4] The person standing in front of the tap is often not concerned with the good of a community, be it human or nonhuman. In this chapter, I argue that water is a common resource, inviting the reader, regardless of context, to understand water as it functions in a community as a "social" good. The theological understanding of the common good promotes this dimension of water as a good worthy of protection for all. Commodification of water is changing the overall perception of water and concretizing the experience of water as a

[3] Wendy Pabich argues in *Taking on Water* that in America the "luxury of simply turning on the tap or flushing the toilet obviates the need to find and carry water or to actively dispose of our waste." See Wendy Pabich, *Taking on Water: How One Expert Challenged Her Inner Hypocrite, Reduced Her Water Footprint (Without Sacrificing a Toasty Shower), and Found Nirvana* (Seattle: Sasquatch Books, 2012), 209. Pabich goes on to state that in America "we have so effectively disconnected ourselves from the natural environment." This is where theologians and sacramental rituals might engage people to honor the biblical and theological tradition that is deeply integrated with nature.

[4] The water in Chicago, or in most of the United States, is actually a public good for which people pay taxes; however, the point I address here is that water in my context is often removed from its public source and thereby perceived and treated as a private good.

private good. This commodified view is destroying the access to water at public catchments and wells, severing community access and involvement around water that has operated for centuries. Catholic social teaching, specifically the common good, provides the platform to address some of the habits associated with a commodified view of water, such as the privatization, pollution, diversion, and bottling of water.

Human beings experience a profound intimacy with water that is dependent on context; water is used in almost every aspect of life. From human beginnings surrounded by water in the womb, to the daily need for hygiene and nourishment with water, water is a resource closely intertwined with life.[5] I am able to take water for granted in my North American context because it has always been readily available to me, but the comfort I experience in my home in Chicago is not universal.

Acceptance of the biblical affirmation of the goodness of creation, and the central message of justice found throughout scripture, should lead to particular actions toward the earth and resources such as water. Water is central to God's creation - a gift - thus perhaps humanity is in need of an ethic that treads gently upon God's waters. Mining the theological resources of Catholic social teaching, such as the common good, which contains robust accounts of justice, will lead to ethical claims creating a new way to value water. Concrete elements of the Catholic social tradition build on the biblical themes of the last chapter and call attention to the good of all humankind and the protection of those

[5] See for example: "How Much H2O is Embedded in Everyday Life?" in The Hidden Water We Use, on Natural Geographic, accessed March 1, 2013, http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/embedded-water/

most vulnerable, providing the groundwork for an approach to water that prioritizes the needs of humans and ecosystems over the profit and consumer-driven mindsets of the market system.

Catholic social teaching is a robust selection of views with diverse themes and emphasis, which is why these teachings are well suited to respond to water injustices.[6] The Catholic tradition has responded to the social injustices of the modern era, and while doing so, has underscored the key elements of justice articulated in Catholic social teaching. These teachings present an overarching summary of the body of modern Church documents and that which to they respond. Catholic social teaching offers "immense wisdom" in addressing the "intersection between faith and politics."[7] The official documents that comprise this social teaching mark a significant change for official Church teaching from an insular, inward focus to a more prophetic, outward approach that addressed contemporary political, economic, and social events.[8]

---

[6] Thomas Massaro articulates nine major themes of Catholic social teaching to highlight the diversity of topics covered in Catholic social teaching, but he and other scholars admit that there are different ways to classify these themes. The themes include: human dignity, common good and solidarity, family life, subsidiarity, property ownership and rights and responsibilities, dignity of work, colonialism and economic development, peace and disarmament, and an option for the poor and vulnerable. Each of these themes sheds light on our religious and moral responsibilities in an age of water crisis. From ownership and rights to water conflicts and wars over water, each has some influence on how water is viewed in our world today. Thomas Massaro, S.J., *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.), 80. See also: Roger Bergman, *Catholic Social Learning: Educating the Faith that Does Justice* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 14-15. Bergman offers a useful summary of the various themes numerous theologians emphasize when dealing with Catholic social teaching, including Massaro; *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (USCCB Publishing, 2004).

[7] Massaro, *Living Justice*, 33.

[8] *Rerum Novarum*, written in 1891 by Pope Leo XIII, is often referred to as the first official document on social teaching. Massaro offers a list of 12 encyclicals including *Rerum Novarum* that comprise the core of Catholic social teaching. Each of these documents deals primarily with social issues and are unique in that

Although Catholic social teaching offers a helpful account of justice, it has a significant limitation due to its prioritizing the human being over all other forms of creation. This chapter seeks to broaden and to expand the application of the common good beyond its original context to address the ecological injustice surrounding the commodification of water. While critiquing some of the anthropocentrism of the tradition, I hope to also reveal aspects that can be used to argue successfully that water is a resource that must be safeguarded due to its intrinsic worth and in order to maintain its accessibility for all beings. The common good need no longer apply only to human relationships but also to human relationships with the natural world and all living creatures.

In this chapter I support my claim by doing four things. First, I look in depth at the common good, its history and development, before presenting the expansion of the common good to include ecosystems. My formulation of the common good of ecosystems is a necessary tool in critiquing the commodification of water while updating the tradition to argue for the value of water as a good of creation and not just a resource at the ready for humans to abuse. Next, I address the anthropocentrism that has dominated the Catholic tradition. The ecological concerns presented by the teachings of the Church have tended to be at the service of human needs, and in this chapter I am pushing Catholic teaching to include the intrinsic value of the earth, especially water.

---

they often explore new ways to think about political and economic challenges of the particular era to which they are addressed. See Massaro, 35-37. However, see Michael Schuck, *That They Be One: The Social Teaching of the Encyclicals 1740-1989* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1991), where he argues that the origins of Catholic social teaching predate *Rerum Novarum*.

Third, I demonstrate how the planetary common good is a more apt descriptor for the common good in that it more adequately responds to the needs of the world today. Fourth, I develop guidelines to protect water for water's sake: water is valuable and worthy of protection as a good of creation. These guidelines include curtailing the practices of commodification of water that detract from the overall functioning of the planetary common good.

The Common Good

I begin by examining this use of this concept of the common good among ancient scholars. Next, I address development of the common good throughout the Catholic tradition. I note the shortcoming of the common good within the Catholic tradition before turning to explore modern expansions regarding the application of the concept. I appeal to the planetary common good as the best way to respond to various concrete situations, including the ecological crisis. I appeal to this planetary common good for the particular way that it can help articulate protection for water and the imperative demand to safeguard water for all species. Finally, I detail how upholding this planetary common good specifically critiques some of the harmful practices that stem from treating water as a commodity.

Aquinas and Augustine theologized the classical notion of the common good that lead to a particularly Catholic view of the person and society. Drawing on Aristotle's

claim that the human person was "by nature a social and political being," [9] Augustine and Aquinas encorproate this concept into their theology. Cicero stated that the commonwealth of people is not just a group of individuals, but rather people "associated in agreement with respect to justice and a partnership for the common good."[10] Augustine refines this view of a community in the classic book *City of God*, where he argues that the ultimate good of every person is the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem; thus, the common good is connected with the true justice of God.[11] Augustine develops a "stringently theological understanding of the common good," which is what Thomas Aquinas cultivates further.[12]

Aquinas lived in an era of "new perspectives" and new "viewpoints," which influenced his development of the common good.[13] Aquinas' genius lay in moving away from the traditional Platonic influences on theology toward one steeped in an

---

[9] Aristotle, *Nicomachaen Ethics* 1097b, 1.10; see also Jacques Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, translated by John J. Fitzgerald (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966,) for more on the Catholic development of the common good.

[10] Cicero, *De re publica* I, xxv, 1.

[11] See *City of God* 19, 23. See also David Hollenbach "The Common Good Revisited," in *Theological Studies*, 50:1, March 1989, 80-81.

[12] Hollenbach, "The Common Good," 81.

[13] Thomas F. O'Meara, O.P. *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian*, 5; see also French article which addresses the unique circumstances of Aquinas' time, Aquinas builds on the ordering of the person and society articulated before him in Aristotle. For Aristotle, "the good life is oriented to goods shared with others – the common good of the larger society of which one is part." For more see David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3.

understanding of Aristotelian science.[14] Aquinas understands the common good as a product of the social nature of a human being, who is "by nature a social animal who lives in community."[15] He writes that a person is not able to come to complete knowledge through his or her reason alone; therefore, "it is necessary for him [sic] to live in society so that one person can help another and different men [sic] can employ their reasons in different ways."[16] By his reasoning, "private" and the "common" are differentiated as "private concerns divide the community while common concerns unite it."[17] Jean Porter, a contemporary Aquinas scholar, argues that this distinction between the private and the common contributes a great deal to Aquinas' concept of the common good. The common good is understood by "contrast to the private or individual good."[18] Further, for Aquinas, "[T]here must be something that moves everyone to the common good of the many," our social human nature thrives in a setting that is structured toward that "good of

[14] DeCrane, *Aquinas, Feminism, and the Common Good*, 43-45. DeCrane presents a helpful summary of the background from which Aquinas emerged. Her appreciation of his context is noteworthy given the feminist hermeneutic with which she approaches Aquinas. For more on the emphasis of science and biology in Aristotle along with access to neo-Platonic thought see O'Meara, 15-27, who argues that Aquinas' access to new sciences coupled with his religious sensibility meant that his "career unfolded around the constant and courageous assertion that Christian faith need not fear realistic world-views or sciences."

[15] Thomas Aquinas, *On Kingship*, in *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics*, trans. and ed. by Paul E Sigmund (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1988), 25.

[16] Ibid., 15.

[17] Ibid., 15.

[18] Jean Porter, "The Common Good in Thomas Aquinas," in *In Search of the Common Good,* ed. Dennis McCann and Patrick Miller (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), 107.

the many."[19] Therefore an individual's flourishing is not the only thing that should be taken into account in accessing the well-being of a community; rather, a community must together experience a sense of flourishing. In this way individual or private goods are subsumed under the common good and there is a burden of responsibility upon the rulers of a society to allocate these goods.[20]

The integration and cooperation of separate entities is of utmost importance to Aquinas' articulation of the common good. He argues that "there is no beauty in a body unless all its parts are properly integrated."[21] In essence individual goods depend on the common good. There is a movement between the people and the common good whereby each contributes to the well-being of the other.[22] Aquinas affirmed that the "good of one man is not the final end, but is directed toward the common good."[23] This reveals the telos of the common good: it is ordered to the divine end or union with the divine.

The development of the common good within the documentary tradition of the Church builds on the foundation laid by Aquinas. Recent Catholic social thought has emphasized two complementary interpretations of the classical understanding of the common good. First, the common good refers to the social reality in which the good of each individual is connected to the good of the whole. In this way the common good

---

[19] Aquinas, *On Kingship* ,15.

[20] Porter, "The Common Good," 109-112.

[21] Aquinas, *On Kingship*, 19.

[22] Porter, "The Common Good," 114.

[23] Aquinas, *Summa Theolgiae*, I-II,90.3, in *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics*, 45.

prioritizes the best interest of entire communities, as opposed to a calculated summation or aggregate of goods employed by a utilitarian approach.[24] The common good, then, supports the basic idea that human beings are social and need to live in relationship with others to survive. The second corresponding theme connects to the actual "conditions" that lead to the common good. Here the common good expresses the personal rights and duties that are afforded to each human being. These rights constitute the minimum standard for society and the need for society to provide people with "abundant resources."[25] These conditions include the right to food, shelter, and bodily integrity. The common good then recognizes that the good of each person is connected to the good of the entire community. This good is expressed in the benefits people experience in society and communal relationships, as well as the good of the material needs required by each person to survive: water, food, and shelter.

Given the scope of my project, I will briefly address the development of the concept in two major documents: *Pacem in Terris* and *Gaudium et Spes*.[26] Dennis McCann argues that these documents were written when the church was identified with

---

[24] See *MM* 59; see also John Stuart Mill, who uses happiness as the guiding principle for his theory of justice. He presents a utilitarian argument using the "greatest happiness principle," which states that actions are right when they lead to happiness and wrong when they do the opposite. The best action brings about the greatest aggregate of happiness, or the greatest good for the greatest number. See John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism,* ed. George Sher (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979, first published 1861), 16. This theory seems to be precisely the opposite value system from the operative idea of the common good within the Catholic tradition as this chapter develops.

[25] *PT*, 33.

[26] For more see: McCann, "The Common Good in Catholic Social Teaching," in *In Search of the Common Good*, 121-146.

"popular aspirations for the good life."[27] The church, McCann claims, insisted "that in the outward march of social progress, no one be excluded or written off."[28] Similarly this era of the church, 1962-1965, signals the pivotal attempt to read the "signs of the times." This age, ushered in by the Second Vatican Council, signaled a turning point for the Catholic Church wherein there was a sustained outwardly dimension as the focus of teachings and documents began to address more fully the needs of the world. These two documents offer clear magisterial descriptions of the common good for Catholic moral reflection.

Gaudium et Spes is a landmark document, which blends social and political concerns with theological claims. In this document, the Second Vatican Council affirmed that a just society results "only if each person, contributing to the common good, according to his [sic] own abilities and the needs of others, also promotes and assists the public and private institutions dedicated to bettering the conditions of human life."[29] *GS* also acknowledges that each new era demands new applications and adaptations of this theme because the demands of the "common good are constantly changing."[30] There is the underlying affirmation that humanity is social and that the organization of society is best suited to support and nourish this relational aspect of the person. Finally, *GS* supports the growing edge of the common good.

---

[27] Ibid., 127.

[28] Ibid., 127.

[29] *GS*, 30.

[30] *GS*, 78.

This brief look at two of the major documents of the documentary tradition emphasizes the two requirements of the common good: the conditions needed in society for fulfillment of life and the protection of human rights. Two dimensions that protect the achievement of the common good are the idea that the human being is social by nature and therefore needs to live in community, not in isolation, and the "sum conditions of the social life which allow members relatively thorough access to their own fulfillment."[31] Human beings, due to their social nature, come to recognize their own dignity and worth in relationships with others. This aspect of the common good supports the general welfare of a people within a community. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* defines the interdependence of humanity as part of the common good: "it [solidarity] is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all."[32] The common good is equally concerned with the good of each individual and the good of the overall society.

Jacques Maritain, a philosopher who modernized the Catholic conception of the common good during the last century, argues that "personality tends by nature to communion."[33] Another way of understanding this natural tendency of the human toward

---

[31] See *GS*, 32; see also *PT* 60.

[32] *SRS*, 38.

[33] Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1973), 47. Maritain, the French-Catholic philosopher- theologian was also one of the drafters of the UN Declarations of Human Rights. His work, and insistence upon the concept of 'persons in community' also had a great influence on John Paul II. For more on this see John Battle, MP, "Hearing the Cry of the Poor," in *Catholic Social Justice*, ed. Philomena Cullen, Bernard Hoose, and Gerard Mannion. (New York: T & T Clark, 2007,) 151-168.

community is arguably what the common good fosters: the true realization of the potential of human beings occurs in relationships with other persons.[34] Like the ancient theologians before him, Maritain presents an unapologetically theological concept of the common good: "God is the common good of the multitude of creatures."[35] Human beings actually relate to the common good through relating to the Transcendent, and ultimately all human beings are ordained toward God.[36] Following the logic of Aquinas (and Aristotle,) Maritain affirms that the "good of the whole is more divine than the good of the parts."[37] It is this logic that supports the stress on the societal dimensions that support the good of the parts: the good of the people rely on the good of society.

Before moving to the second dimension of the common good, human rights, it is important to mention the dignity of the human, which in many ways undergirds the entire Catholic concept of the common good. Human dignity links the two components of the common good. Maritain claims that a "person requires membership in a society in virtue of both its dignity and its needs."[38] He affirms that the dignity of a human has social dimensions; it is realized and affirmed in relationships with others. For David Hollenbach, a contemporary theologian, dignity is connected to the good of society and

---

[34] Hollenbach, "The Common Good," see also Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*.

[35] Maritain, *The Person and The Common Good*, 24.

[36] Ibid., 15-18.

[37] Ibid., 29.

[38] Ibid, 47.

therefore human dignity is a social rather than a private affair.[39] The human person comes to the realization of his or her dignity and sacred reality in a community with other human beings; therefore, upholding the common good is a commitment to the dignity of human beings.

The second dimension of the common good, then, flows from the idea that it is society as a collective whole, rather than the rights-bearing individuals themselves, which provides the human person with the conditions of existence and development that she or he needs.[40] The common good, which is about the good of society, is only attained when protection for individual human rights are also firmly in place. *Pacem in Terris* offers one of the clearest descriptions of human rights from within the Catholic tradition. *PT* asserts that the "common good is best safeguarded when personal rights and duties are guaranteed."[41] Further, peace is realized in the common good as it expresses these human rights.[42] It is important to stress here the type of rights that are underscored in this encyclical; John XXIII argues that everyone is entitled to "the right to life, to bodily integrity, and to the means which are suitable for the proper development of life."[43] These rights naturally encompass "food, clothing, shelter, rest, medical care, and finally the

---

[39] Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict: Retrieving and Renewing the Catholic Human Rights Tradition*, (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 55.

[40] Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good,* 48.

[41] *GS*, 60.

[42] Drew Christiansen, "Pacem in Terris**,"** *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries & Interpretations*, Kenneth B. Himes, ed. (Washington D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 223.

[43] *PT*, 11.

necessary social services."[44] Safe drinking water is one of these rights that was safeguarded and connected to the common good by John XIII.[45]

Maritain defines these needs, or conditions, as flowing from the material existence of humans: bread, clothes, and shelter.[46] The common good "implies and requires recognition of fundamental rights of persons."[47] The modern Catholic documents such as *PT* and *GS* also begin to place an even greater emphasis on this idea of human rights.[48] *PT* connects the dignity of the person to the divine, and it is from this dignity that rights and duties fundamental to each individual flow.[49] My focus on human rights is focused specifically on how these rights are mandated as a priority of the common good.

Hollenbach focuses on the concept of human rights especially as these rights connect to the common good, further developing Maritain's ideas. Human rights naturally have a social as well as an individual foundation.[50] Rights language has often tended to focus solely on individual experiences and conceptions of what is due to a particular person; the Catholic understanding of human rights, however, lays claim to the social nature of the person and thus these rights are experienced as a social

---

[44] Ibid, 11.

[45] Ibid., 64.

[46] Ibid, 48.

[47] Ibid, 51.

[48] *PT*,

[49] *PT* 9-10; See also Christiansen, "Pacem in Terris," 226.

[50] Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict*, 55.

phenomenon.[51] In his development of the modern theory of Catholic human rights, Hollenbach is careful to stress the idea that the common good is "founded on mutual dignity, is not in opposition to human rights, but rather their guarantee."[52] Human rights are best understood within the framework of social interdependence.[53] It is imperative to recognize that the concept of human rights flow from the inalienable human dignity that each human person has. This human dignity makes claims on others so that it can be upheld and respected. It is in this way that the rights of individual persons flow from the overall common good.[54] Access to water, as a human right, functions within the common good because it upholds the dignity of humans.

The concept of the common good, in its twofold dimension, as articulated by scholars such as Hollenbach and Maritain, points to a particular social reality. Maritain understands the human being in this way: the human being has a need to live in societal relationships based on one's desire for communication of knowledge and love. Additionally, the person must depend on others for satisfaction of physical needs such as shelter and food because of particular deficiencies characteristic of material individuality.[55] From this understanding Maritain presents an analogical concept of the

---

[51] See Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict*, Part I, where he addresses the human rights debate for more on the history and modern interpretations of human rights.

[52] Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict,* 61.

[53] Ibid., 61.

[54] Ibid, 89-90.

[55] Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 47-49.

common good. Human society is viewed on an analogical scale where humans exist somewhere between the animal society (who are unable to communicate with God) and the divine society.[56] The person is "an analogical idea which is realized fully and absolutely only in its supreme analogue, God."[57] Maritain here implies that the human person's capacity to love is found in the final end of humanity: union with God.[58] This capacity for love and relationship is worked out in communion with other persons on Earth and in finally with God. The analogical concept of person impacts the common good since the common good of humans is always directed toward God, the "supernatural beatitude."[59] There is a dialectic that emerges from this understanding of the common good: the person needs society and society needs the person. The common good flows not only from individuals to society but also from society back to individuals. Maritain claims that the common good redistributes itself to the people.[60] This idea of the common good concludes with the two features I have highlighted: human need to live with others in community to realize their full potential, and similarly human need to live with others to account for their material needs.

Water must be a component of the common good. The first dimension of the

---

[56] Ibid., 57-58.

[57] Ibid., 56.

[58] For more on this idea of the human person and the supreme analogue of God see David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 130.

[59] Maritain, *The Person and the Common Good*, 62.

[60] Ibid., 76.

common good affirms that water is necessary for the general welfare for a community of people. Without water, a human being cannot survive, much less flourish. The "rights and duties" dimension of the common good also helps to clarify the implications of the common good for access to water. Water is one of the material needs of human beings; it fits into the category of food, clothing, and shelter, which theologians have emphasized as part of the common good. This language makes it essential to claim that access to water is a human right. Hollenbach states it this way: "The fulfillment of human need is an essential aspect of the common good, for the resources of nature are given by God to the human race in common for the benefit of all its members."[61] Although theologians have found different ways to conceptualize the common good, I argue any adequate conception of this concept must include access to clean, safe water.[62] Since the common good points to the social nature of the human and the organization of society, water is needed both by the individual and for the good of society. Without access to water, the general welfare of a society is out of reach.[63] However, I argue that more than just the needs of humans must be protected in terms of access to water. I turn now to address what I see missing from this traditional articulation of the common good within the tradition, before framing a broader interpretation of the common good: the planetary common good.

---

[61] Hollenbach, *Claims in Conflict*, 150.

[62] Frank Sawyer, *The Poor are Many: Political Ethics in the Social Encyclicals, Christian Democracy, and Liberation Theology in Latin America*, (Netherlands: Kok Pharos, 1994), 2.

What Is Missing from the Tradition?

While the encyclicals of CST present a robust understanding of the dignity of human beings, what is lacking is an approach to the natural world that recognizes the inherent goodness of creation and the corresponding responsibility human beings have for the care of the environment. Here I argue that the teachings of the church fail to see the deep interconnections between human beings and the Earth's ecosystems. I also press upon the narrow focus on the human being found within these teachings. I do note later in the chapter that there have been recent accommodations to address environmental stresses; however, they still tend to focus on the good of the environment for the sake of human good. The problem here is that it perpetuates an idea that a good such as water exists for the human instead of valuing water for its intrinsic worth.

What is missing are concrete recommendations for how to respect creation, or the "*why* and *how* this responsibility [toward nature] is an *essential* part of Christian faith and discipleship."[64] This is the critical gap I see in this tradition, namely a failure to embrace a cosmocentric ethic. Without such an expansive lens, we are left with a narrow focus on the human in the environment without any recognition of the environment within which the human exists. It is this gap in the tradition that leads to clear claims regarding human rights; however, the tradition fails to place the rights of the human within the web of creation and the corresponding need for ecological justice. What emerges is a valuation of water that fails to encompass its great worth beyond just the human dependence upon

[64] Marcus Mescher, "Neighbor to Nature,"in in *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment* (Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2001), 201.

it.[65] I maintain that the doctrine of creation laid out in the Genesis narrative is ignored as environmental ruin continues. The vision presented by the biblical authors points to a flourishing of all creation including human beings, not the flourishing of humanity at the expense of creation, which comprises the anthropocentric view of creation.

The common good has primarily been concerned with the flourishing of the human being and the conditions (including water) that maximize the wellbeing of humanity. While I in no way mean to diminish the importance of this active stance toward human welfare within the strata of the social teaching of the Catholic Church, I do wish to call attention to what is missing when these terms are focused solely on human beings. The doctrine of creation, addressed through the biblical story in the previous chapter, is arguably ignored when the actual creation of God's Earth is not attended to.[66] This doctrine of creation, in both its articulation in biblical sources and across its history of doctrinal prominence, is replete with references to water and God's presence in and around the sparkling waters of the earth. There is a movement toward awareness for the environment within the tradition that this chapter will reveal; however, this awareness is often grounded in the significance of the environment at the service of human beings. I push for an environmental awareness that values a good such as water for its intrinsic worth.

---

[65] See Daniel P. Scheid, "Expanding Catholic Ecological Ethics: Ecological Solidarity and Earth Rights" in *Religion, Economics, and Culture in Conflict and Conversation,* ed. Laurie Cassidy and Maureen H. O'Connell (College Theology Society Annual Volume 56, 2001), 212 for more on this limitation within the tradition.

[66] Michael J. Petty, *A Faith that Loves the Earth: The Ecological Theology of Karl Rahner* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1996), 5.

The common good might address the flourishing of all creation, especially water, and be better understood as the planetary common good. The earth is suffering.[67] Water is an integral component of the conditions that allow both the environment and the human to flourish. This is why the commodification of water is a necessary place for the resources of the Catholic tradition to offer a critique. These tools may help set limits to the commodification of water, by enabling a set of criteria for when particular practices are harming the planetary common good. The overall measure of the common good must always be the well-being of the least in any society, the poor. In an analogous way, I argue the measure of an ecosystem's flourishing is water, the invisible, often ignored component upon which all other things function.

The human family today exists in a web of interdependent relationships with the natural world. Failure to apply the concept of justice articulated in the common good to more than just human beings has created a great problem and arguably fueled the environmental crisis of our time. The common good of humanity is deeply connected to the health of ecosystems.[68] William French claims that *GS* failed to address issues of "human sociality" and "solidarity with other humans" within the "larger frame of the

---

[67] Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

[68] For more on this theme see Christopher P. Vogt, "Catholic Social Teaching and Creation," in *Green Discipleship*. He argues that "every person has a right to live in a place in which the environment has not been degraded, in which people are not exposed to dangerous toxins, and in which clean water is readily available," 226; see also M. Shawn Copeland, "Who Will Live the Common Human Good?" in An Address to the Convention for the Common Good, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Friday, 11 July, 2008, 4; and also Drew Christiansen, SJ in, "Ecology and the Common Good: Social Teaching and Environmental Responsibility" in *And God Saw That It was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment,* ed. Drew Christiansen, S.J. and Walter Grazer (Washington, D.C: United States Catholic Conference, Inc.: 1996).

ecological question."[69] The applicability of the common good today must account for new global and environmental trends - namely the good of the ecosystems within which human beings are so intricately connected. Human flourishing and dignity understood within this wider application of the common good depends on the flourishing of the entire Earth community. I turn now to look at the various ways the tradition has begun to account for the environment, and I argue that this will reach its fulfillment when the well-being of water, the fundamental element of creation, is continually safeguarded.

Modern Expansions of the Common Good within the Tradition

Aquinas tended to employ the common good to account for the good of a political unit, a relatively small defined group of individuals. John XXIII, however, departed from the classical notion of the common good in *Mater et Magistra*. Acknowledging that human relationships often extended beyond the nation-state dimension, he calls attention to the increase in social relationship and "mutual ties."[70] *PT* develops an even more expanded component of the common good and refers to the universal common good as the good of the "whole human family."[71] Finally, *GS* mentions the "ever broader realization of the common good," and notes that the needs of the common good are constantly changing in response to the parts of the world that are still "suffering from

[69] William French, "Greening Gaudium et Spes," 199.

[70] *MM*, 59.

[71] *PT*, 123.

unbearable want."[72] In this way I see a general progression for the expression of the common good to encompass the ecological dimension of the planet that is ailing at present.

The "planetary common good," which I argue should be the main frame for any discussion of the common good today, is mentioned in the U.S. Bishop's 1991 document, *Renewing the Earth*.[73] It is this planetary common good that I will develop further as I look to the significance for water in establishing the conditions for this planetary dimension of the common good. The widening reach of the common good is significant given the minimal concern for the stability of the natural world in Christianity's first 19 centuries.[74] In that period there were few threats to the nonhuman natural world, thus the concentration of moral attention was to the fragility and dignity of the human. However, much has changed, and today scholars are addressing the need to bring moral ecological thinking to the common good. In other words, the moral reasoning around the common good must expand to see the goods of creation as fragile and worthy of protection.[75]

---

[72] *GS*, 74, and 84.

[73] USCCB, *Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching*, 1991.

[74] See Drew Christiansen, "Ecology and the Common Good: Catholic Social Teaching and Environmental Responsibility" in *And God Saw that it was Good*, 183-195. Here Christiansen details the long history of the common good (as "one of the oldest principles of Western political philosophy") before turning to apply it specifically toward a growing edge of scholarship within the application of the concept: environmental responsibility; see also Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), where he holds that the traditions of Western ethics were shaped by an assumption of the stability and "giveness" of the natural world.

[75] See for example William French, "Greening Gaudium et Spes"; see also Christopher P. Vogt, "Catholic Social Teaching and Creation," in *Green Discipleship*; Christine Firer Hinze, "Catholic Social Teaching and Ecological Ethics," and Drew Christiansen, SJ in, "Ecology and the Common Good: Social Teaching

My claims for this planetary common good are informed by one of the more ecologically prophetic documents of the Catholic bishops: *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*. This *Columbia River Pastoral Letter,* written in 2000, addresses the watershed area in the Northwest region of the United States and the South-west region of Canada. The document looks to the multiple stresses upon the waters of the Columbia River region in terms of the ecological justice and the thriving economic operations that are embedded within the waters (salmon fishing as an example.) This pastoral represents the strength of what the tradition is capable when it wades into issues of ecological justice. The bishops from the region treat the geographic range of the watershed as a "common home."[76] They are concerned with connecting the biblical affirmation that water is a source of life, birth, and renewal, with the ecological problems that "bedeviled the region."[77] To accomplish this, the bishops appeal to a connection between caring for "creation, community, and the Columbia."[78] Emphasis is placed on the reality of the economic development of the region to honestly try and find the best way to care for all those dependent on the watershed region while protecting the integrity of God's creation. The bishops claim that "industry must respect

---

and Environmental Responsibility" in *And God Saw That It was Good: Catholic Theology and the Environment;* Jame Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 19.

[76] An International Pastoral Letter by the Bishops of the Region, *The Columbia River Watershed: Caring for Creation and the Common Good*, 17.

[77] See Michael Agliardo, SJ, "Restoring Creation and Redressing the Public Square: Religious Environmentalism and the Columbia River Pastoral," in *Green Discipleship*.

[78] *The Columbia River Watershed*, 1.

people and nature and take particular care to be cognizant of its impact on the common good."[79] This document connects the reach of the common good to a watershed region, which includes the entire biotic community, not just the people in the affected region.[80] The *Columbia Pastoral's* unique contribution is its approach to the common good through the lens of ecological justice, thus a departure from the normal anthropocentrism of Catholic social doctrines.[81]

Contemporary theologians make a move similar to the one undertaken by the bishops of the U.S. Pacific Northwest. Daniel Scheid, one such contemporary scholar, argues that within Aquinas' understanding of the common good and the order of the universe, an idea of the "cosmic common good" emerges, which is helpful in addressing ecological concerns.[82] Aquinas' theories naturally tend toward a cosmic orientation, common to an era that appreciated the good of the entire cosmos and natural world as

---

[79] Ibid., 7.

[80] For more on the geographical region of the Columbia River Watershed see: Glennon, *Unquenchable*, 115-116; 289, 290, and 292.

[81] John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 147; see also *Green Discipleship*, 51.

[82] Daniel Scheid, "Thomas Aquinas, the Cosmic Common Good, & Climate Change" in *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*, Jame Schaefer, ed. (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press: 2011), 127. Scheid argues that the "cosmic common good" emerges from these three points in Aquinas work on the common good: "universe surpasses in excellence any individual creature;" "ordered interconnections between creatures;" and "cosmic common good glorifies God, and to glorify God is the ultimate purpose of every creature and of the universe as a whole." Schied is among many scholars who employ Aquinas at the service of a Catholic ecological ethic based on his appreciation for this sort of a cosmic order and the affirmation of the good of all creation. See also: Jame Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009); Daniel Scheid, "Saint Thomas Aquinas, the Thomistic Tradition, and the Cosmic Common Good" in *Green Discipleship;* William French, "Grace is Everywhere: Thomas Aquinas on Creation and Salvation" in *Creation and Salvation Volume I: A Mosaic of Selected Classic Christian Theologies*, ed. Ernst M. Conradie, (LIT Verlag Muster, 2011).

intertwined with the good of humanity.[83]

Building on the central claim that the common good is inherently connected to the protection of human rights, Scheid extends these rights to the Earth. He argues that it is the failure to use rights language in regards to the Earth that leads to "insufficient means for engendering and enforcing human responsibility."[84] Seeing the Earth as a part of creation that is worthy of certain "rights" that are connected to human responsibility is one of the most effective ways to bring a cosmocentric component to the teachings of the Catholic tradition. Rights language is useful to expand the "understanding of what has value and what deserves protection."[85] Thus, talking about water-rights or earth-rights can potentially help reshape human understanding about the value of water and the corresponding responsibility to safeguard water.[86] A renewed awareness of the interdependence of human and nonhuman species can aid the theological reformulations of the common good and the corresponding rights for the Earth, as well as the protection of a resource such as water as a dimension of the common good.[87]

---

[83] William French, "Greening Gaudium et Spes," 199; see also, Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*.

[84] See Scheid, "Expanding Catholic Ecological Ethics," 214; see also James Nash, *Loving Nature*, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility,* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991).

[85] Scheid, "Expanding Catholic Ecological Ethics," 206.

[86] Scheid notes the hesitation that theologians may have with expanding these terms since they may correspond with a dilution of the human rights language when these rights are no longer solely for humans. To this critique he posits that there are clear ways to articulate the differences between human and nonhuman relationships. He argues that it is important to mine and refine the terms within the Catholic tradition in terms of addressing ecological justice since these particular terms have a history, thus reformulating them within the tradition gives a "gravitas they might not otherwise have," in "Expanding Catholic Ecological Ethics," 198.

John Hart's book *Sacramental Commons* expands the notion of the common good to apply to more than just human beings. This expanded common good, then, becomes the "collective well-being of a community," both human and biotic. A broader common good implies an "Earth benefit that is or should be shared" by all living beings.[88] Beyond just distribution of resources among human beings, Hart is concerned with the notion that humankind must learn to share water more responsibly with all of creation,[89] which would include keeping water pollution-free, not only for the sake of human beings, but also for all the species that depend upon that water.[90] This resource-sharing also carries with it a sense of "intergenerational responsibility": caring for members of the human and biotic communities must include not only the present generation, but future ones as well.[91] The common good embodied in all creation means that community and individual needs must take priority over private wants.[92] Hart supports the notion that the common good does have a planetary dimension. I add that this planetary common good can exist only if water is protected as a good that sustains the flourishing of all the ecosystems on the planet.

---

[87] See Scheid, "Expanding Catholic Ecological Ethics," 204-205; see also Schied's argument on the 'cosmic common good,' in "Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *Green Discipleship,* 136-139.

[88] John Hart, *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 147.

[89] See also Garrett Harden, "The Tragedy of the Commons" published in 1968 (*Science* 162 (3859):1243-1248) in which he argues that regulations are required to prevent overuse of general common resources.

[90] Hart, *Sacramental Commons,* 152.

[91] Ibid., 152.

[92] Ibid., 149.

The Planetary Common Good and Water as an Intrinsic Good

Water must be safeguarded from the effects of commodification for two reasons. First, water serves as the life-blood of ecosystems (and of Earth itself). Commodification effects such as pollution and diversion frustrate the natural flow of water, resulting in unhealthy ecosystems that, in turn, negatively impact the human communities that depend on them. Second, above and beyond water's instrumental role in the flourishing of human beings and ecosystems, this sacred part of God's creation also has an intrinsic value. In order to account for both these factors above, I argue for a conception of the common good refocused on the planet as a whole, rather than understanding the good of human beings in isolation from the ecosystems of which they are a part. Without such a refocus, an anthropocentric approach to the common good fails to respond adequately to the effects of commodification.

The planetary common good prioritizes not only the health of human communities, but also the flourishing of ecosystems because such a view recognizes the interdependence of the two. Focusing on the common good within the human community without giving serious attention to the proper functioning of ecosystems inhibits human flourishing. Therefore, a more complete understanding of the common good must take into account not only the factors that directly uphold human dignity (shelter, food, etc.), but also the ecological processes that a narrower conception of the common good might set aside as ancillary. For example, the common good ought to take into account not only basic human needs, but also the health of an essential ecological process like the hydraulic cycle.

The hydraulic cycle, in simple terms, is the way that water moves on and around the earth. As water evaporates from lakes, rivers, ice, and snow, it is absorbed back into the atmosphere where it is recycled and returns to the earth in the form of rain. The ground absorbs this water allowing it to fill aquifers located below the surface of the earth. In this way, the hydraulic cycle functions on the earth in much the same way as the circulatory system in the human body. Practices that disrupt the natural cycle of water (such as the building of large dams) harm the natural world and all of its inhabitants, just as a blockage in blood vessels puts the entire human body at grave risk. The planetary common good takes such harm seriously; therefore, such an approach can more adequately respond to the unjust effects of commodification.

More particularly, I argue that the planetary common good must account for the centrality of water in the overall health of the planet and its inhabitants. In many ways, water is the invisible reality that sustains all life. Our culture, especially in North America, has become accustomed to water as a commodity; consequently, we fail to respect this resource for the essential role it plays in sustaining our existence– not only as what we drink, but also as the life-blood of the planet that sustains us. The planetary common good then cannot function without attending to water.[93]

---

[93] Feminist scholar - Suzanne DeCrane offers critical analysis of Aquinas, and opens the door for a broader application for the common good. It is her methodology I borrow here where I use the traditions robust understanding of human dignity within the common good and apply it to all of nature, thus a common good of the entire earth community, which includes water. Specifically, DeCrane presents a feminist retrieval of Aquinas' use of the common good. See for example DeCrane, *Aquinas, Feminism, and the Common Good.* She presents a "retrieved principle of the common good, privileging the experience of women's suffering as an evaluative and interpretive lens…" The good of this retrieval lay in the idea that "the genuine common good of the community is *only* pursued to the extent that those who are most at risk within the community receive particular attention and are attended to with moral and practical seriousness, 117; Crane

Second, water requires protection not only because it is an element necessary for societal and ecological functioning and is a fundamental human right, but also because it has intrinsic value. Water sustains all of creation, as affirmed in the doctrine of creation; water is a good worthy of respect and reverence. In light of ecological degradation today, we need to value water as water, not only as it supports humanity, but also as a sacred part of God's creation, as an end in itself.

Although the common good as traditionally conceived by the Church does firmly establish access to water as a human right, this stance neglects the significance of water's intrinsic value. Without an acknowledgment of this intrinsic value, we run the risk of viewing water in a merely utilitarian sense, as a means to an end. Consequently, such a view leaves water vulnerable to the effects of commodification. The anthropocentric approach to the common good traditionally taken by the Church would value water primarily as a necessary ingredient for human flourishing, ignoring the equal significance of ecosystems and water's intrinsic value. However, valuing water as a sacred good and as an end in itself defies manipulative practices resulting from the commodification of water. As with many ecological issues, we seem to lack the necessary foresight required to appreciate the effects that our actions, done in the name of convenience or

---

argues that retrieving a concept such as the common good from Aquinas and reading it through a feminist hermeneutic can "demonstrate that a feminist, liberationist approach to ethics can accommodate and appropriate a universal claim that has seemed, for centuries, to oppress-not liberate-women." (xii) For more on her method which is informed by Sandra Schnieders, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Martha Nussbaum see 3-41. Crane is one of the many scholars who addresses the anthropology of Aquinas, particularly his view of women, which was based on "inaccurate biological and physiological information, and the ways in which he extrapolated from that misinformation resulted in a subordinate status for women," 46.

commodification, have on the Earth and all living species.

The planetary common good can become a guideline for measuring the protection of water as that which sustains ecosystems. To the extent that water is protected, kept relatively free from pollution, used responsibly, and understood in the context of its own life cycle, one can argue that the planetary common good is upheld. The Church affirms that water policies must "promote the good of every person and of the whole person."[94] Unfortunately, the Church's focus on the *"centrality of the human person"* has contributed to pollution and mismanagement of water because such an approach fails to acknowledge the interdependence of human flourishing and ecological health. Therefore, the common good must also be manifest in water policies that address not only human needs but also the health of water itself and the ecosystems that water sustains.

The planetary common good might also provide the underpinnings of policies for the just distribution and use of water. As far back as Aquinas, we can find language to support a sustainable use of resources. He argued that the use of things of the Earth should fall in the category of "only for as much as the need of this life requires."[95] Within this statement are a clear sense of moderation and the sustainable use of goods, such as water. Scheid argues that Aquinas would most likely find rampant consumerism to be

---

[94] For more on this statement see: *A Contribution of the Delegation of the Holy See on the Occasion of the Third World Water Forum*: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20030322_kyoto-water_en.html, accessed November 2, 2013.

[95] *ST*, II-II:q q. 141, a. 6.

problematic given how it disrupts the natural order of the universe.[96] Aquinas argues that there is "no sin in using a thing for the purpose for which it is."[97] Simply put, the purpose of water is to sustain life and by extension to enhance the functioning and flourishing of God's creation. Water is not a good created for the purpose of driving the market, maximizing the profit of multinational corporations. Therefore, practices of commodification which disrupt and alter the primary function of water can be called into question by the ideas of Aquinas and their application to Catholic social teaching. The common good requires that all beings have ready access to subsistence needs, such that "the well-being of all should be sought and secured."[98] Consumerism and ecological degradation detract from the common good.[99] When the market controls and manages water, the profit margin tends to "over-rule" the common good.

Using the planetary common good as a way to measure the health of ecosystems then becomes also a way to argue for the necessary protection needed for water. If the health of ecosystems is one of the ways to measure the reality of the planetary common good, then the harmful practices of the commodification of water can be deemed unjust in that they alter the natural cycle of which water is a part. Principles for reflection then

---

[96] Scheid also argues similarly that Aquinas would certainly "criticize unbridled consumption," within this there is arguably room for the foundation of ecological ethics, in "Saint Thomas Aquinas," in *Green Discipleship,*131 -133.

[97] *ST*, II-II, 64, objection 64.

[98] Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 150; see also See Christiansen, "Ecology and the Common Good," 193. He stresses the need for education to change public ideas around goods such as "clean air and water" that comprise the planetary common good.

[99] See *Centisimus annus*.

would include how do the practices of commodification help or hinder the overall planetary common good. As a principle, for instance, dam building is not always bad, yet, when massive dams are destroying ecosystems and dislocating people, concerns for the overall planetary common good are raised. Next, the implications of specific practices for commodification can become criteria for judging how these practices impact the planetary common good. Again, the bottling of water is not inherently a bad practice, but when the sale and profit from these bottles becomes more important than guaranteeing that all species have access to water, this can be judged harmful in terms of its impact on the planetary common good. Finally, ethical actions can be derived from an integrated approach to the planetary common good.

Porter claims that one of the negative elements of Aquinas' definition of the common good lies in the fact that he leaves "little in the way of a substantive account of what the common good is, or what the conditions for its attainment must be."[100] On the contrary, I argue that this is part of the genius of Aquinas' legacy regarding the common good. He created a definition wide enough to account for the natural dynamism that exists in properly applying this concept to changing circumstances throughout history. The common good has been a term that is hard to define fully, especially within the realm of Catholic social thought, because it is "resistant to tight conceptual definition."[101] It is this broad frame of the common good that allows theologians to adapt the concept of the common good to respond to the particular needs of the present moment. Water has

[100] Porter, "The Common Good," 116.

[101] McCann, "The Common Good in Catholic Social Teaching," 122.

always been a part of the common good. It is a necessary resource for society to function properly and also a fundamental human right. However, one thousand years ago, just access to clean water was not a societal problem, so perhaps viewing water as part of the common good was not essential. Today, however, it is. Thus, there is room to emphasize this unique dimension of the planetary common good for the world at present.

Just water requires a paradigm shift from the anthropocentric, profit-driven commodification of water to a cosmocentric approach that values water for its real intrinsic worth. Ironically, a seemingly anthropocentric approach to the common good actually does not benefit humanity in the long run because such an approach fails to account for the interdependence of human beings and ecosystems. Subordinating the needs of ecosystems to the needs of human beings actually harms human beings. Also, the anthropocentric approach fails to value water for its intrinsic worth as a sacred part of God's creation- the life-blood of the ecosystems upon which all of creation depends. Therefore, I argue for the planetary common good as an apt extension and refocus of this Catholic social teaching principle for responding to the injustice of water commodification.

The Common Good and Water: A Critique of the Privatization of Water

Chapter one addressed the skewed and inadequate value for water that emerges from a commodity-based worldview. Like the biblical themes I analyzed in the previous chapter, I argue here that the view of water as essential to the attainment of the common good should replace the commodified view of water, as it presents a more just and integrated value for water. In particular, the common good approach aptly responds to the

injustices of privatization and of the pollution of water. Instead of seeing water as a resource that can be privatized and polluted, I argue that water should be understood as an element of the common good- something that is "meant for all."[102]

I see privatization as one of the greatest stumbling blocks to the common good in a variety of social arenas, one of which is the provision of water to earth systems as well as human beings. Access to water as an element of the organization of society seems essential to the common good. Hart points out that if people own their own land and resources without being forced to purchase them, they are more likely to be able to meet their own needs and break the cycle of poverty.[103] Shared public ownership, then, enables citizens to participate in resource management while privatization strips people of that right. With privatization, water companies have a mixed motivation; maximizing profit often conflicts with just water distribution. The common good is concerned with access to the basic necessities for life. As a result, the common good might help drive policy toward protecting the interests of individuals in the face of corporations such as Nestle or Bechtel.

Privatization interferes with the basic assumption that access to water is a human right.[104] The Catholic Church has emphasized that "the right to water, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of quantitative assessment that

---

[102] *SRS*, 42.

[103] Hart, *Sacramental Commons*, 151.

[104] Peter Rogers and Susan Leal, *Running Out of Water*, 133; see also *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*, which states that "the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right." No. 484-485.

considers water as merely an economic good."[105] Water is a human right and not an economic good. In this assertion by the Catholic Church, the right to water is connected to the dignity of human beings; thus water is an inalienable right. Water is not something that humans should risk losing their lives over if they cannot afford the price for water determined by a corporation. More than just the tradition's assertion that water is a human right, water is also connected with the fundamental right to life, and therefore the Church might form people's moral conscience to understand the demand that all human beings have access to water.[106]

When governments share control of resources such as water with local groups there is a sense of common ownership, care, and accountability.[107] The public sector is managing a good. The responsibility to provide water is shared by those in public office. Privatization presents a very different framework and set of values. While it may work in some instances, cases abound where privatization leads to greater stress around access to water such as the case in Cocabamba, Bolivia, noted in chapter one.[108] When water is privatized, it is viewed as "separate and distinct from the land on which it was found."[109]

---

[105] *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 485.

[106] *Caritas in Veritate*, 27. One might argue that food systems are privatized.

[107] Of course there are numerous problems often which might accompany corruption at the level of the government, however, the scope of my project does not allow for this. For more on this argument see: *Running Out of Water*, 130-143.

[108] Peter Rogers and Susan Leal, *Running out of water*, 141.

[109] "Privatization: A Challenge to the Common Good," accessed November 15, 2012, http://www.ucc.org/justice/public-education/pdfs/Privatization.pdf

Thus water is transported from certain regions and sold on the market to the highest bidder while the people who are proximate to the water source often have no say in how the water is used. Additionally, local people lack access to water that originates on their land unless they are willing to pay exorbitant prices. As the common good affirms, water should be a right of everyone and should not be denied to those who may not have the means to afford it.

The Common Good and Water: Responding to the Rampant Pollution of Water

When water is polluted the common good is dismissed since the value of water as a clean substance is intended for the good of all, living and non-living species. When water is polluted it fails to create the conditions needed to ensure the community's well-being. Thus, pollution detracts from the planetary common good. It is often the poor who live closer to polluted water sources and suffer more than the rich from the effects of pollution.[110] The common good is ignored when the poor are excluded from the possibility of flourishing. Similarly, polluted water harms ecosystems as plants and animals that rely on the water suffer and the ecosystem as a whole declines.[111] The failure to secure clean water for all species on the Earth detracts from the planetary common good.

One example of this is the case of the Coca-Cola Corporation creating a plant in

---

[110] Kathryn Lilla Cox, "Green Solidarity: Liberation Theology, the Ecological Crisis, and the Poor," in *Green Discipleship*, 267-268; 278-283.

[111] For more see: Jame Schaeffer, "Environmental Degradation, Social Sin, and the Common Good," in *God, Creation, and Climate Change.*

a rural area of India, Rajasthan. The production in the plant caused nearby water sources to become polluted, so while Coca-Cola produced their product and earned a significant profit, the local people who had lived on the land for generations suffered.[112] Not only was the water polluted, but the plant drew water from the local community to make its product, which left less water for crops and less water to drink due to decreased quantity as well as pollution. This type of situation has a direct impact on the common good of the global community. What might responsible water usage that accounts for the common good here look like?[113] In what way might the needs of the entire community and the livelihood of the ecosystems that comprise this region have been better attended to?

In this case, and others like it, the planetary common good is ignored in two ways. First, the conditions for human and ecological flourishing are destroyed when the company plant takes up residence in a local community, as evidenced in the pollution, the lack of water, and the diminished access to food. Second, the rights of the local people are dismissed as their right to water and food is compromised. The profit margin of a company like Coca-Cola trumps the needs of the local people. This is where the ethical implications of terms such as the planetary common good have import in considering the needs of a community before building a plant like this one. Perhaps a location for the plant could be found that would not have led to such devastating effects for the local community.

---

[112] Kathryn Lilla Cox, "Green Solidarity: Liberation Theology, the Ecological Crisis, and the Poor," in *Green Discipleship*, 270.

[113] Ibid, 270.

Pollution plagues not only other regions of the world, but also the United States. The New River, which flows from Mexico into California, reportedly carries 20 million gallons of raw sewage, known viruses, and numerous pesticides and chemicals.[114] Pollution detracts from the overall functioning of the common good. The view of water as a commodity tends to increase practices that pollute and undervalue water, which ultimately detracts from the overall functioning of the common good. The common good delineates the conditions in society that allow for the flourishing of the human person. Here I have argued that the common good, reframed as the planetary common good, supports more than just what humanity requires but also what the Earth might require to flourish. There is a fundamental truth here that the good of the human race might be connected deeply to the good of the Earth. John O'Neil, an environmental ethicist states this clearly: "The best human life is one that includes an awareness of and practical concern with the goods of entities in the nonhuman world."[115] All life forms flourish when we value natural resources as ends in themselves, rather than as means to an end. Within this concept of the good of ecosystems there is an affirmation that water has value in and of itself and not simply as a means for human survival and flourishing.[116]

Conclusion

But where does anybody learn to say: "Enough! Share!" In this

[114] Glennon, *Unquenchable*, 68; see also 72-74 on more statistics regarding the pollution of waterways in the U.S.

[115] John O'Neill, "The Varieties of Intrinsic Value," in *Earthcare* ed. David Clowney and Patricia Mosto, (New York, NY: Roman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), 155.

[116] Ibid., 144.

> environment of overpopulation, overconsumption, and maldistribution, if one asks what are the human institutions most likely to curb these maladaptive appetites with a sense of more inclusive and longer-range common good in a finite world, there is a clear answer: the world religions.[117]

The common good is essential to the Catholic tradition, especially in terms of articulating the needs of human welfare and the corresponding moral claims and responsibilities. The crucial step now mandated by the water crisis, and demonstrated by the commodification of water, is to expand the concept of the common good to encompass authentic cosmocentric concerns. Honoring and valuing water as an integral part of the common good has import for the entire Earth community. Beginning to speak of the protection of water, and what this might mean for water, may create policies that limit Nestle's right to over-pump the streams in Michigan; it may open the door for tighter regulations of large dams and pollution to water-ways, and even critique the way bottled water is used. Employing the planetary common good as a litmus test for the distribution of water supports the claim that water is for the good of the commons, not only the good of the market, and that water must be safeguarded for all creation.

In order to successfully use the resources of the Catholic teaching tradition, it is necessary to add a cosmocentric lens to the main ideas of Catholic social teaching. I argue this can actually serve to strengthen the applicability of Catholic social teaching to ecological issues and further is at the heart of the message of the teaching tradition: responding to the needs of society as they emerge and are discerned (reading the signs of

---

[117] Holmes Rolston, "Saving Creation," 137.

the times) with the tools and concepts that have been used for centuries within the Catholic Church. Rolston argues that it is the work of world religions to uphold the "common good." In the midst of "overconsumption and misdistribution," these very religions must critique behavior such as commodification of resources which truly have become "maladaptive appetites." Depending solely on the consumption of bottled water, especially in the United States, that benefits from clean tap water, is one such appetite. This practice fails to consider the "longer range common good" and harms not only the Earth at present but also for future generations. Thus, using robust terms from within the tradition, the common good and applying it to ecosystems is necessary to support the notion that nature is not "simply a system of resources of raw materials for our use."[118] Rather the tradition helps affirm that nature is a part of the common good, respecting nature, which is essential to honoring God's creation. God's command throughout the Bible to care for the poor can be extended equally to care for God's creation, for water as a life issue connected with the flourishing of all life forms.

Further, highlighting significant strata of Catholicism's heritage to respond to the water crisis demands a response from the Catholic community. What is needed is a new value system for water that extends the sacred nature of water found in the Bible and the spiritual and sacramental appreciation celebrated in ritual and ceremony to the material use of water. Pope Benedict XVI eloquently argues:

> Those who consider water today to be predominately a material good, should not forget the religious meaning that believers, and

[118] Mark Sagoff, "Consumption," in *Earthcare*, 683.

> Christianity above all, have developed from it, giving it great value as a precious immaterial good that always enriches human life on this Earth. The full recovery of this spiritual dimension is ensured and presupposed for a proper approach to the ethical, political, and economic problems that affect the complex management of water.[119]

Approaching the complex problems that surround the commodification of water might lead to a Catholic approach that affirms the importance of water for the human dignity of all and the goodness of water for all creation. The common good, expanded to articulate and respond to the dynamic concerns of the water crisis today, offer a helpful starting point to present moral norms and recommendations from within the Catholic tradition.

The next and final chapter turns to ecofeminism, which offers a cosmocentric corrective to the shortcomings and anthropocentrism of Catholic social teaching. Ecofeminism also takes seriously the needs of both women and the Earth, and therefore is a useful theory to apply to the injustices existent in the water crisis. I find myself in agreement with the method and insights of this rich theory and further see dynamism when worldview upheld in ecofeminism is joined to some of the rich heritage of the Catholic articulation of justice. Bringing some of the rich theories from the Catholic tradition into dialogue with the ideas of ecofeminism is where I argue the seeds of ethical and responsible action steps will emerge toward a more just valuation of water.

---

[119] Pope Benedict XVI, "Papal Message at International Expo of Saragosa," Message to Cardinal Renato Raffaele Martina (July 15, 2008,) *Catholic Social Principles Towards Water and Sanitation*, ed. Dennis Warner (Baltimore, MD: Catholic Relief Services, 2009,) 10, http://resources.crs.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/catholic-social-principles-towards-water-and-sanitation-_revised-2092.pdf, accessed October 5, 2013.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESPONDING TO THE COMMODIFICATION OF WATER: ECOFEMINISM

> In most societies, women have primary responsibility for management of household water supply, sanitation, and health. Water is necessary not only for drinking, but also for food production and preparation, care of domestic animals, personal hygiene, care of the sick, cleaning, washing, and waste disposal. Because of their dependence on water resources, women have accumulated considerable knowledge about water resources, including location, quality, and storage methods. However, efforts geared towards improving the management of the world's finite water resources and extending access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, often overlook the central role of women in water management.[1]
>
> We cannot survive (even to be greedy) unless we acknowledge our profound dependence on one another and on the Earth.[2]

tell them about the water
how we have seen it rising
flooding across our cemeteries
gushing over the sea walls
and crashing against our homes
tell them what it's like
to see the entire ocean level with the land.[3]

On a cold and dry November morning, I watch the humidifier in my living room turn water into moist air. It helps to counteract the dryness in the air created by the radiator heat that keeps my family warm through the long Chicago winter. The privilege

---

[1] UN Water: *Gender, Water, and Sanitation: A Policy Brief.*

[2] McFague, *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Ecology for a Planet in Peril* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 99.

[3] An excerpt from "Tell Them" by Marshallese Poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, accessed December 10, 2012; for the entire poem see: http://jkijiner.wordpress.com/2011/04/13/tell-them/.

of using water in this way is not one I take for granted. As I will discuss in this chapter, the various ways in which the day-to-day lives of women in developing nations are tied to water usage reveal a complex and, at times, disturbing reality. If I were a woman living in many other parts of the world, the privilege of easy access to water would be unknown to me. In the Marshall Islands women spend entire days managing the water and food for family members in the home. This time spent in water collection kept the women from going to school and engaging in many employment opportunities. Water storage was an important element of women's work in order to prepare for days when the water was not running through the taps on the capital island of Majuro. On Thursdays, water usually did not run due to the lack of electricity across the island; however, the electricity was sporadically unavailable as well throughout the week. The situation on the smaller outer islands, like Alinglaplap, where people were totally dependent on rain water, created different stresses on water management for women who held the responsibility of providing nourishment for their families. During the dry season, there was scant water, and people were forced to manage with minimal water, forgoing nonessential amenities such as bucket showers and laundry. Women around the world often hold the task of caring for their family, securing water, therefore, is one of the corresponding realties of this task.

In Mwanza, Tanzania, I remember seeing hundreds of Masai women walking

along the dirt roads carrying up to 20 kilograms of water on their heads.[4] I never saw a man doing this; women are usually responsible for transporting water on their heads over long distances. The privilege I enjoy with the use of a humidifier comprises a small part of the 1,280 cubic meters of water used by each North American on average per year. In contrast, most Africans have access to only 186 cubic meters a year.[5] Women in Africa, in the Marshall Islands, and in other areas around the world perform almost all of the labor associated with water collection and management. Managing scarce quantities of water requires a unique skill that is absent from my context of water privilege.

In this chapter I present an account of ecofeminist theology that draws on the unjust gendered hierarchies that complicate a women's access to water. The commodification of water only serves to increase the stresses that women face when trying to secure water for their families. Ecofeminism responds to the concrete injustices women face, especially those in the developing world who live closest to some of the most dramatic environmental crises. Ecofeminism presents a robust critique of the harmful practices that destroy both the earth and women.

My goal in this chapter is to present a theory for water justice rooted in the Christian tradition and expanded by ecofeminism. This theory honors the sacred dignity of all creatures, while prioritizing the reality and experiences of women. Ecofeminism

---

[4] "Domestic water carrying and its implications for health: a review and mixed methods pilot study in Limpopo Province, South Africa," accessed December 1, 2012, http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2939590/.

[5] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization and World Religions* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2005), 21.

affirms a cosmocentric view of the world that elevates the role of nature and ecosystems. Such a cosmocentric focus helps orient ethical practices toward protecting water. This cosmocentricism also offers a corrective to the human-centered focus of Catholic social teaching. Ecofeminism highlights the disproportionate harm to women and nature that emerges from practices of commodification and a worldview that values water and other resources found in nature as commodities. I argue that drawing on the strengths of ecofeminism, such as the mutuality and interdependence of all creatures within a cosmocentric worldview, can provide an ecological lens to seeing the common good more clearly. I find it to be the most adequate theory to articulate a new and more adequate value for water that values water more authentically than the commodity view.

First, I look at the theory of ecofeminism. With its contextual methodology, it is the most appropriate tool to examine the concrete facts and realities surrounding many women's relationship with water across the globe. These facts shed light on the reality that women encounter greater health risks, violence, and educational setbacks than men when water is viewed as a commodity because this commodity view problematizes access to water for millions of women around the globe. This section also addresses the harm to ecosystems, which I addressed previously in regards to viewing water as a commodity. After addressing the methodology of ecofeminism, I develop three other pertinent themes that I argue are central to a broader appreciation for water: the interdependence and mutuality of all creatures, a critique of the dominant economic model, and a cosmocentric worldview. Drawing on thinkers such as Ivone Gebara, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Sallie McFague, who concretely address the above

themes, I shed light on how each of these has positioned their ecofeminist work to critique the commodification of water. Finally, I look to how ecofeminism critiques the commodification of water and the negative effect this has on women and the earth. I argue here that ecofeminism successfully responds to the complicated interconnection between the degradation of women and that of ecological destruction, both of which stem from the commodification of women and of the Earth's resources.

Finally, I present my contribution as an ecofeminist to a new understanding and appreciation of water– a just water theory. Ecofeminism is a theory that aids my articulation of an alternate view of water. In particular it actually builds on some of the ideas presented in the biblical account of water by placing emphasis on the inherent goodness of creation. It also picks up some of the ideas found within Catholic appreciation of creation which celebrates, honors, and ritualizes the material aspects of creation and calls attention to the needs of the marginalized in a unique manner. Several ecofeminists place the significance of creation within the concept of God's home or body.[6] In this section I integrate these ideas and themes with the concepts of ecofeminism to strengthen its role in providing a necessary corrective to Catholic social teaching and ultimately arguing for a new value system for water.

Ecofeminism: A Method of Response to the Commodification of Water

Many feminists argue that the core value commitments of the feminist movement demand that their sense of responsibility and care extend to the non-human and natural

[6] See for example: Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1993).

world as well. Ecofeminism links the "age-old oppression of women and earth," which represents a "new stage in ecological thinking."[7] Ecofeminism employs feminist concerns while arguing for the inclusion of nature into the realm of discussions of justice and the implicit connections between the exploitation of both women and nature.

Ecofeminism broadens the concerns of feminism beyond the social, political, and economic status of women and embraces a "fundamental re-envisioning of the whole reality, including the human relationship to non-human nature."[8] The word "ecofeminism" was first used by Francoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 to mobilize women in an ecological revolution.[9] Since then the term has been used to classify hundreds of scholars and activists who demonstrate complementary concerns regarding the dual exploitation of women and nature rooted in the common ideological structure of patriarchal societies. Collaboration between ecologists and feminists leads to more robust critiques for a problem such as the commodification of water.[10] Another outcome of this scholarship is the ability to bring together different disciplines to find new solutions and new opportunities for dialogue.

Ecofeminism has become a helpful umbrella term not only for scholars but also for activists who are working to highlight the environmental degradation and exploitation

---

[7] Heather Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2005), vii.

[8] A. Clifford, "Ecofeminism and Ecofeminist Theology," in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia, Second Edition,* ed. Thomas Carson and Joann Cerrito (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group, Inc., 203), 48.

[9] Eaton, *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies*, 3.

[10] Ibid., 3.

of women. As a result, ecofeminism has often been connected with praxis and the concrete work to bring about justice. Ruether argues that there is not one ecofeminist movement but rather a variety of movements dealing with issues of domination of women and nature.[11] The empirical evidence that this chapter reviews makes it clear that environmental problems, like access to clean water, present more harm to women than to men throughout the world. The United Nations noted in 1989 that the woman "is the worst victim of environmental deterioration" and that "the poorer she is, the greater is her burden."[12]

The theoretical dimension of ecofeminism posits conceptual relationships between women and nature. In most parts of the world women work and live in a fashion that is often closer to the natural environment than men.[13] Ecofeminists claim that the connection between women and nature is central to "women's oppression and ecological ruin."[14] Of course the reality is that all of us, women and men, are embedded in nature, so we all live in communion with nature; however, cross-culturally, women are often the primary care-givers of children, and, in many societies, women's domestic responsibilities often include the lion's share of crop-growing, farming, water-hauling, and wood-gathering. The upside of this division of labor leads to a wealth of knowledge

[11] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Introduction" in *Women Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 2.

[12] Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen, introduction to *Ecofeminism and Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context and Religion,* ed. Heather Eaton and Lois Ann Lorentzen (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 2.

[13] Ibid., 2.

[14] Ibid., 38.

that these women have about the ecological world. However, the negative effect is the perpetual stereotype that sees the world in hierarchical and dualistic ways. This division of power and control of resources allows men to dominate both women and nature. The negative aspect of this conceptual relationship is where ecofeminism demands correction.

Seeing the positive side of the connection with nature that exists for women allows ecofeminists to ask: Might women be the best to create holistic solutions to ecological injustices?[15] Vandana Shiva observes the ways women have come to claim their unique relationship with nature and fight for ways to protect nature while retrieving a feminist principle for honoring the creativity of all life, in contrast to "patriarchy which underlies the process of ecological destruction and women's subjugation."[16] Ecofeminism reflects on injustices that harm women and the Earth while simultaneously affirming the avenues for hope and change that women have often pursued.

Linking women and the environment reveals deep rooted injustices that lead to extreme suffering for all, but especially for women and the Earth.[17] Even though women in many parts of the world are deeply engaged with basic agricultural work and obtaining food, fuel and water for family use, these same women do not have decision making rights regarding access to and use of these resources. This reality exists regardless of the fact that women often suffer the ill consequences silently, often without a voice to

---

[15] Ibid., 2.

[16] Shiva, Vandana, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1988), xviii.

[17] Eaton and Lorentzen, "Introduction" in *Ecofeminism and Globalization*, 5.

transform the situation.[18] In many instances women experience the stress of environmental degradation more than men in many instances because they are disproportionally represented in lower-income groups.[19]

Ecofeminist Themes

Now I address pertinent themes in the works of Ivone Gebara, Sallie McFague, and Rosemary Radford Ruether. A Brazilian Catholic Sister and theologian, Gebara uses her everyday life experience to ground her scholarship. She continually puts theology in dialogue with the daily lives and struggle of the poor people that she lives and works with on the streets of São Paulo, Brazil, the "world of the poor, of the hungry, and of the illiterate; of those who have no lands to live and those who live on lands tainted by toxic wastes and nuclear radiation."[20] McFague is a prophetic voice from the Protestant tradition. She has written extensively about feminist theology and recently addressed the topic of climate change and its impact on the way humanity understands and relates to God.[21] Finally, Ruether is a prominent voice within the Catholic tradition, who works within both feminist and ecofeminst theories. She initiated the discourse on women and nature in her groundbreaking book, *New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, written in 1975. For Ruether, ecofeminism addresses the roots of

---

[18] Ibid., 13.

[19] Mary Mellor, "Gender and the Environment" in *Ecofeminism and Globalization*, 14.

[20] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 18.

[21] See McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008).

male domination of women and of nature and particularly how this domination impacts social structures themselves.[22] The themes I present, underscored in each theorist, are: a contextual methodology, interrelationality, a response to the dominant consumer model, and a cosmocentric worldview. Each one of these themes critiques a view that prioritizes water as a commodity. They also supplement the themes of the common good, explored in the previous chapter, by suggesting ways in which Catholic social teaching should be reframed to meet the ecological and social needs of the world today.

Contextual Methodology

Women exist within different religious groups, class structures, and locations.[23] Gender is always in flux, as Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, a feminist water scholar, claims. She defines gender in a pervasive sense, meaning "the roles and responsibilities of, and the social relationship between, women and men."[24] Further, she notes that "water, like gender, is known for its fluidity, for changing its shape and taking new forms; it plays a special role in the social and cultural constructions of environment."[25] I argue that the commodification of water has changed the shape of water, constricting its fluidity to conform to market structures. This reality has exacerbated the stress women experience as they secure water for their families, since the market and forces that have led to great

---

[22] Ruether, *Gaia and God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 2.

[23] Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt, "Introduction" in *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water*, ed. Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt (Kolkata, India: Mandira Sen, 2006), xiv.

[24] Ibid., xiii.

[25] Ibid., xv.

success in certain areas of development growth, do not always lead to positive outcomes for women.[26]

The reason I turn to ecofeminism to respond to the impact of the commodification of water on women is because this contextual methodology starts with experience. This contextual methodology does not begin with abstract concepts, rather it honors the unique encounter between women and water, allowing space to critique how market dynamics have complexified this encounter. With its concern regarding context, ecofeminism also posits claims about the health of the environment because the ecological systems that contain water are the background for the relationships between water and women.

The stories I tell here begin to reveal the context for women and water. These accounts of women and their relationship to water are in no way representative of all women (even the ecofeminists that I present do not speak for all women.) Rather, I present a limited perspective from particular studies, such as the UN documents on women and water. The point of this section is to engage a concrete issue through the contextual analysis that ecofeminists rely on. It is the commitment to a contextual approach to justice found within ecofeminism that offers a critique to the commodification of water and its effects on women.

Ecofeminists are aware of the impact of their location in witnessing to the effects of the commodification of earth's resources. For instance, Ruether understands that her context as a North American woman causes her to experience a very different

[26] For examples of this, see, Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Development*.

relationship to nature than many of her companion ecofeminists working in other parts of the world.[27] From this place of relative solidarity, Ruether reminds her readers of the oppressive power of her own country, the United States of America.[28] Like Ruether, I have personally observed some of these realities- in other countries, but it is not typically my own reality, so I use caution when reporting the facts. Solidarity emerges from more people untangling the unjust realities for women when it comes to water access and, as a result, more just policies might emerge, which is why I engage this topic here.[29] Although it is hard to claim that a unified contextual methodology that encompasses all ecofeminists exists, Ruether's argument is that many themes from the ecofeminist

---

[27] See Ruether, *Women Healing the Earth,* where she presents a collection of essays from women in Latin America, Asia, and Africa who are working on issues of religion, feminism, and ecology.

[28] Ruether, *Woman Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion* Ruether, ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 1. As noted at the opening of this chapter, I enjoy the luxury of using water (which exists in abundance in my context) to humidify the dry air in my home. I turn on a tap and the water is there. My relationship to water and subsequently the natural world around me contrasts sharply from that of my friends in the Marshall Islands who depend on changing rain patterns to secure enough water to support their family. The rain and weather patterns do not affect my relationship with nature other than the need for an umbrella when going outside. The rain and weather fluctuations lead to a doubling of work for the women in the Marshall Islands and throughout other arid parts of the world. When there is scant or unpredictable rain patterns, women work harder to secure water. Ruether argues that environmental crises lead to actual impoverishment for women in the third world, whereas many in the first world simply look to statistics regarding these crises and continue to live in relative comfort. Awareness of an individual's particular social location and how it relates to the reality of others is something that Ruether argues will enhance a sense of true solidarity. This awareness encourages scholars working from within the first world to be aware of their particular context. The relative comfort many people in the developed world enjoy is often at the expense of others' livelihood. Ruether continually makes this connection clear in noting her own social location as a scholar, but still honors the wealth of knowledge available from women who do live in a more consciously dependent relationship with nature. See Ruether, *Women Healing the Earth*, 4-8.

[29] I have come to a particular interest in water and women based on my own experiences in several countries witnessing to the concrete reality many women in the developed world experience regarding securing water for their families. Had I not spent time in places like Ecuador, The Marshall Islands, Kenya, and Nicaragua and walked with women in the arduous task of survival connected to water, I would not have understood their experience as different from my own, which involves turning on a tap.

movement do address the context that reveals how "women and nature have both been exploited by their own societies" and how women "function as mediators of nature's benefits for their families."[30] Both women and water are exploited when water is treated as a commodity. This is the context from which my claims in this chapter emerge.

Gebara's methodological approach takes seriously the voices of the poor. Her scholarship and witness reveal that the poor woman today is indeed the "poorest of the poor."[31] The strength of Gebara's work, like other liberation theologians, is found not only in its clear presentation of theological ideas but also in the applicability of her concepts for women globally who are on the margins. Her theology aims to dismantle the whole paradigm of male dominance and reveal the harm for women and the earth that lies within it.[32] Gebara uses the day-to-day struggle of a people in the "absence of sewers and safe drinking water, poor nutrition, and inadequate health care" to inform ecofeminist claims.[33] With this contextual methodology in mind, I turn now to address some of the contexts from which women experience a particular relationship with water that affects these women's well-being.

Although entire communities suffer when access to water is compromised, the first to experience harm are women, since they are often the primary handlers of water.

---

[30] Ruether, "Introduction," in *Women Healing Earth,* 2.

[31] Gebara, "Option for the Poor as an Option for Poor Women" in *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology,* ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 145.

[32] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 25-30.

[33] Ibid., 2.

Increasing water scarcity, which exists across the globe, has led to growing problems for access to water for all, but especially for women. When water is commodified, polluted, and privatized, it fails to function as a life source for all humanity and to support Earth's systems. Women bear the brunt of this burden in a unique way. After this brief contextual analysis of the gendered dynamics at play between water and women, I will discuss why commodification of water often problematizes the already precarious relationship many women experience with water.

The intricate connection between women and water is filled with complex roles, responsibilities, and stereotypes.[34] Women suffer far more from unclean water than men. Although women have a multi-layered knowledge of water within communities in terms of irrigational uses, household management, and collection, they rarely have any voice at the level of policy decisions regarding how that water is controlled and distributed.[35] This exclusion of women's knowledge and expertise from decision-making regarding policies of water usage continues to limit the overall well-being of both men and women.[36] After showing some of the connections, I look to areas of acute stress for women in this regard: health, safety, and security. Each of these contributes to the impoverished state of women in many parts of the world, and I argue this reality is further exacerbated by the trends toward the commodification of water.

---

[34] Alice Aureli and Claudine Brelet, *Women and Water: An Ethical Issue* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2004), 8.

[35] See UN Document: *Water: Gender, Water, and Sanitation*.

[36] Ibid., 6.

In many parts of the world, women encounter numerous factors that determine their ability to secure sufficient amounts of water for themselves and their families.[37] Gebara depicts the reality for women of shantytowns: "They wash clothes…when there is water, there is no soap…when there is soap, there is no water."[38] Women across the globe who do not enjoy the luxury of a running tap are most often responsible for water collection, for the management of water in the household, and for farming irrigated crops.[39] At least half of the food produced in the world is grown by women; in parts of Africa and Asia, women grow eighty percent of the food.[40] Water collection for women in most of the developing world is a task that can consume up to eight hours per day.[41] As water scarcity increases, the distance a woman has to travel to secure water also increases. On average, women and girls walk 3.5 miles a day in the developing world to fetch water.[42] When water is privatized, and becomes priced out of reach for local communities, women often have to walk even further to secure water that is still available for public consumption.[43] It is estimated that 40 billion hours per year are spent hauling

---

[37] Shiva, "Women and Vanishing Waters," in *Staying Alive*, 179 – 217.

[38] Beti-Rio as quoted in *Out of the Depths*, Ivone Gebara, 22.

[39] Alice Aureli and Claudine Brelet, *Women and Water: An Ethical Issue* (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2004), 6.

[40] Ibid., 6.

[41] Ibid., 8.

[42] International Atomic Energy Agency. *Women and Water: Staff Report*, 2007, accessed December 6, 2012, http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/news/2007/womenday2007.html.

[43] Shiva, *Staying Alive,* 179.

water when one combines all the time that women spend globally.[44] Not only is the time spent considerable but also the arduous task of finding water for one's family produces an enormous amount of fatigue, which further limits what women accomplish during the part of the day that they are not hauling water. When clean water sources are inadequate, unreachable, or over-priced, the use of unclean water also increases the risk for infection and disease, both for women and for those for whom they care, usually their children and parents.[45]

In addition to exposure to diseases due to unclean water, water collection practices introduce more health risks for women. Collection consumes time and valuable energy while forcing women to carry up to forty-five pounds on their head over the distance needed to return home. Carrying water upon the head adversely affects the health of their spine. Continued stress upon the head and neck leads to deformities and injuries as well as arthritic diseases.[46] Women of all ages face a lifetime of complications connected to these collective processes. Those who do not have to balance a heavy container of water on their head typically draw water from a well, which causes constant strain on the back due to the bending and lifting. After pulling water from a well for my first time in the Marshall Islands, I experienced a new level of understanding of the pain and suffering associated with this daily task.

---

[44] Water Aid, "Gender Aspects of Water and Sanitation," accessed December 1, 2012, http://www.wateraid.org/documents/plugin_documents/microsoft_word__gender_aspects.pdf, 2.

[45] Aureli and Brelet, *Women and Water*, 12.

[46] United Nations, *Women 2000 and Beyond: Women and Water* (2005), 10.

The hidden health risks connecting women and water are often underappreciated because women and water are not often analyzed side by side. One example is that the higher worldwide rates of blindness for women, which can be traced to the incidences of eye infections that exist for children when proper hygiene and water is absent. These infections, once passed to the caregiver, most often the mother, in many cases lead to blindness when left untreated.[47] Malaria, another water-related disease, disproportionately affects women during pregnancy, which leads to a host of complications for both the mother and child. A pregnant mother with malaria is more susceptible to anemia which in turn causes a higher risk of maternal death. A baby born to a mother with malaria usually has a lower birth weight, which increases the vulnerability to other disease and infections.[48] Ironically, women, like water, provide life, yet they face death when the water they use is contaminated, in short supply, or inaccessible.

The risk of injury involved in the task of water collection is great while women walk over rough terrain under great physical stress. Frequently, these paths expose women to violence because they lack protection on mostly isolated routes. The infrastructure to support access to water in many parts of the world is not created with the safety of women in mind.[49] During conflicts, such as those present in Africa over the use

---

[47] Ibid., 10.

[48] Ibid., 10.

[49] Denis Warner, as presented in "Panel on Water, Women and Conflict: A View from the Field" (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, August 29, 2011).

of the Nile, the violence escalates, with war crimes such as rape being perpetuated on women.[50] This use of violence toward women is often unreported during conflicts; however, the ripple effects are severe and have lasting consequences. Women often live in a state of continual fear, worried over the possibility of rape and violent attacks, which means that they may use unclean water rather than risk assault during long journeys to secure fresh water. Some women experience the terrible fate of being taken from their homes during conflicts.[51] This instability puts women's safety at risk while they travel dangerous routes to secure water for their families. During conflicts, the first people affected are the women; however, the trauma and its effects spread to households and the community at-large.[52]

In addition to these health and safety risks, women often lack access to education because of their water responsibilities. As the amount of time for water collection and management increases, a girl's ability to attend school decreases. This lack of education perpetuates the cycle of poverty for many women worldwide.[53] Two main factors keep girls from going to school: time-consuming water collection routines and lack of access to sanitation and water-based hygiene while at school. Girls often don't use toilets while at school and many don't attend during menstruation or drop out of school all together

---

[50] Ibid.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid.

[53] United Nations, *Women 2000 and Beyond*, 5.

once they hit puberty.[54] The ability to focus on education is challenging when girls are worried about access to sanitation and their health while at school. While teaching sixth grade in the Marshall Islands, I saw the effects of this problem daily. Several girls would leave school for the day to use the toilet at home. My house was on the school grounds and, once comfortable, many students and faculty would come there to use the toilet instead of using the ones at school. Girls shared with me that it was safer to come to a private home to use a bathroom instead of risk the cultural stigma and corresponding fear for them to use a public bathroom. This reality prevents equal access to fair education for girls and boys.[55]

Kuntala Lahairi-Dutt wishes to broaden the scope of water policies that impact women and make gender issues visible in water at all levels and for all people. For her, gender must be understood in the context of the different places and the relationships that people are enmeshed in. Otherwise a gendered approach to water will remain a distant dream.[56] She claims that "water is always a metaphor for social, economic, and political relationships- a barometer of the extent to which identity, power, and resources are shared."[57] Thus, already before gender is even mentioned, water is a complex resource that is connected to livelihood and survival, and the struggle to maintain both. To extend

---

[54] Ibid., 12.

[55] See UN Water: *Gender, Water, and Sanitation*, 5, for how wide-spread these sanitation issues are. Cited in this document are two projects, one in Mozambique and one in Bangladesh, that increased girl's success and attendance at school when proper latrines and washing stations were installed.

[56] Lahairi-Dutt, *Fluid Bonds*., xxiii.

[57] Ibid., xvi.

her insight in to the problem of commodification, I argue that when water is valued as a commodity, social, economic, and political norms also shift toward a profit focus that fails to account for the good of women and the earth. The rich have access to water; the poor do not. Those in power continue to secure water; those on the margins do not.

This section has presented a snapshot of the context for many women across the globe. The focus on the context and experience of women that is central to ecofeminism has guided this analysis. It is in accessing a situation, such as the commodification of water, that ecofeminists have come to rely on the importance of themes such as a cosmocentric worldview and mutual relationships. I argue that the commodification of water only serves to aggravate these gender hierarchies that make access to water and responsibility of securing water arduous for women. Employing ecofeminist themes helps to critique this injustice.

Interrelationality

Interrelationality is a core concept of ecofeminism. Ecofeminism sees interdependent and mutual relationships as a correction of hierarchical and dualistic relationships, which comprise are often found in the Enlightenment philosophers' view of the human as independent. Ecofeminists understand the human as existing in a web of relationships. This interconnection and mutuality serves to critique the some of the consumption practices in the commodity view of water, which values the human as consumer and water as commodity.

Against the Enlightenment account of the self-sufficiency of the individual, Ruether argues for "a radical reshaping of the basic socioeconomic relations and the

underlying values of this society."[58] The Enlightenment gave rise to a preference for individual liberty, self-governance, and autonomy. While in some ways these modes of thought gave birth to democracy and other great achievements, the focus on the individual has sometimes come at the expense of the common good, and the celebration of human progress has resulted in a lack of humility in the face of God's creation. Ruether argues that we are not isolated beings; instead, we are truly relational and dependent on others and on the natural world for our survival.[59]

McFague similarly argues that, to the detriment of a true relational understanding of the person, we have lost a sense of the individual as someone who exists within a community.[60] She continues this theme of reverence for all creatures and the responsibility that accompanies relationships in the web of creation, in her newest book *A New Climate for Theology*, where she places her ecological theology at the service of mobilizing attention for the emerging crisis presented by global warming. McFague argues that this ecological theology is not new, but rather is simply returning Christianity to its cosmological roots.[61] Like Ruether, McFague claims that Christianity must depart from the individualistic view of self that has been dominant since the Enlightenment and should embrace the reality that humans depend on one another and the natural world.

---

[58] Ruether, *New Woman New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*, (Boston, MS: Beacon Press, 1975), 204.

[59] Ibid., 202.

[60] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 82.

[61] McFague, *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 49.

This invites people to imagine themselves as part of nature instead of separate from it.[62] Ecology is arguably about life and death; it is in applying the "house rules" for our planet that enable certain species to survive and flourish, while ignoring such rules is the path toward loss, degradation, and destruction.[63] These house rules imply sharing, simplifying, and curtailing unjust practices that harm other species among which humanity cohabitates.

Gebara argues that dignity must be restored to the earth and to women and men who are alienated from both the earth's body and their own bodies, ultimately "dividing what ought to be united."[64] Views that compartmentalize humanity and the Earth fail to unite that which God's creation mandates should be united. This focus on individual integrity and wholeness parallels an ideal of unity and just relationships among God's creatures and the earth. Gebara's central question as an ecofeminist is: How do feminist and ecological issues change our understanding of our own reality?[65] She notes that through thinking and understanding one comes to recognize true interdependence, not only with each other but also with the earth.[66] It is through ignoring this communal and relational existence that human beings have become "nature's greatest predators" and

---

[62] Ibid., 49.

[63] Ibid., 50-53.

[64] Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), ix.

[65] Ibid., 21.

[66] Ibid., 51.

also "humanity's greatest murderers."[67] The current situation, marked by depleting natural resources, especially clean water, affirms the need to rely on this interdependence and "relatedness" to and with one another and the earth. In language reminiscent of Karl Rahner, Gebara honors the mystery of the human person and sees people as a "word capable of allowing other words to resonate with it."[68]

Gebara's theology, like her anthropology, is based on an understanding of "relatedness." God as relatedness is "possibility," "opening," "unexpected," and "unknown."[69] To view God and the human through the concept of "relatedness" connects us innately to the divine and to other creatures. This idea of relatedness is crucial in maintaining healthy relationships with others, but it is also crucial that an individual strives to overcome the dichotomy in her or his life and to create a unity within as well.[70] Thus for Gebara transformation of human relationships, and of the relationship between humanity and the earth begins with a personal, individual, and spiritual transformation.

Interrelationship, interdependency and mutuality with the earth form the central foundation of the distinct voices within the canon of ecofeminism.[71] These ideas serve as the underlying principle to critique the dominant economic profit model that is operative

---

[67] Ibid., 75.

[68] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 99. See also, Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*, 224-227.

[69] Ibid., 103.

[70] Gebara, "Option for the Poor as an Option for Poor Women" in *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology,* ed. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996), 144.

[71] Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism*, 123.

in the globalized world today. It is this dominant economic model that drives the commodification of water, valuing water only for its profit margin and not its life-sustaining capabilities. This same economic model leads to the depletion of natural resources at a pace that nature's natural recovery processes cannot match.[72] The poor bear the direct costs of this dysfunctional system, and tragically they have no voice in devising a solution to a problem they experience more directly than those who have power. Within ecofeminism lie powerful ideas flowing from the relationality of all beings that call for an end to destructive policies toward the earth.[73]

Response to the Dominant Economic Model

One such unjust reality to which ecofeminists respond is a "neo-classical economic worldview," which has tended to marginalize the significance of women and Earth's resources.[74] McFague argues that economics is not only about money but also about value systems and how people attribute the worth and meaning of particular things, especially when things are scarce. She claims that what drives this current global economic system is the self-interest of individuals, and the way to attend to scarce resources is by meeting the needs of human interests.[75] McFague's work is helpful in making claims about water, especially because water is not just a resource that supports

---

[72] Heather Eaton, "Can Ecofeminism Withstand Corporate Globalization", in *Ecofeminism and Globalization*, 24.

[73] McFague, *New Climate for Theology*, 126-129.

[74] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 75.

[75] Ibid., 76.

humanity. Just as we speak of the life cycle of a river, or a lake, we can argue that nature's needs to which are not accounted for in the present economic system. Valuing water only as a commodity fails to honor the biblical concepts that underscore implicit care for the resources of the earth because they have a value in and of themselves not only as goods for human consumption. Valuing water only as a commodity fails to account for the planetary common good.

In *Life Abundant*, McFague's focus is on the role that North Americans play as consumers and how excessive consumptions leads to the destruction of nature as well as hardships for the poor among us. North Americans experience the highest level of the "good life;" this however, leads to a great divide between the rich and poor of the world and depletes natural resources at a rate faster than is sustainable. Her suggestion is to offer a form of living that is connected with an idea of "enoughness," which challenges humanity to understand abundance in a different way.[76] Instead of accepting the money-valued economy, which "takes only what it needs from nature and human life to fuel its activities and only provides products and services which are profitable," many ecofeminists argue for attention to "distinctively feminist economics."[77] These feminist values would impact the economic system by valuing reciprocity, ecosystems, sufficiency, and the maintenance of human beings.[78]

---

[76] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 14.

[77] Mary Mellor, "Ecofeminist Political Economy and the Politics of Money," in *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice: Women Write Political Ecology* ed. Ariel Salleh, (New York, NY: Pluto Books, 20090, 251.

[78] Ibid., 251.

Like Ruether, McFague argues that lifestyle choices driven by a consumer mentality exacerbate the marginalization of those in poverty. Similarly, this lifestyle, equated with a high level of consuming, harms the natural world in the form of unnecessary trash and excessive pollution. Since the world is indeed where God dwells, humanity might consider what McFague calls "God's rules," consisting of justice and care for nature, as opposed to the "dominant consumer model."[79] She argues that "religions are in the business of recommending counter-cultural visions of the good life."[80] We need these visions to respond to the water crisis and its effects on women. McFague's ideas offer great promise to the skewed value system for water. In order to respond with justice, there must be an appreciation of the cosmic value for a resource such as water and an awareness of the well-being of others.[81] While market capitalism fails to account for the toll that development and consumption takes on nature and on women, ecofeminist theories do account for the harm commodification might present for women and nature.[82]

Often linked with globalization, the misfortune that accompanies women and nature seems to coincide with "success" in the Western socio-economic system. This system that prioritizes men over women and economic growth over the good of nature does not lead to healthy and balanced relationships between all people and other living

[79] Ibid., 14, 25; See also Lestor Brown, *Plan B 4.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization*, Chapter One, "Selling Our Future", 3-23.

[80] Ibid., 24.

[81] Ibid., 37.

[82] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 94.

organisms. While globalization accounts for quantifiable factors like economic growth in certain respects, it does not consider the immeasurable, yet significant, realities such as human dignity and ecological ruin. Interestingly, Heather Eaton argues that the real cost/value of water is not understood by all; similarly the true cost of women's work is lost on many. Women's labor is often underappreciated in many contexts and never compensated for or, when paid, it is at a lower rate than men's work.[83] Based on this reality, ecofeminists stress that solutions to the global ecological crisis must account for the gender dynamic that exists or there will not be any solutions at all.[84]

It is this dominant economic model that fuels some of the most harmful practices toward nature and in particular toward water. Development that has led to growth and profit has actually created what Shiva calls "maldevelopment," which is the result of the arrogance of "anti-nature and anti-women development programs," allowing humanity to think that it can create and alter water without consequence.[85] The economic model that functions in the market and makes consumers out of people and commodities out of things does not apply to the water cycle. Shiva's point about the failure of certain development strategies that have served to exacerbate the water crisis emerge because humans exert power over water instead of participating in and with the natural water cycle. Arguably, Shiva supports the idea that, to work with nature and support the water

---

[83] Eaton., 17.

[84] Ibid., 19.

[85] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 183.

systems, humans must realize their dependence on water and actually learn to "think like a river."[86] This ability to find connections with nature instead of exploiting and profiting from a resource like water is what animates the entire ecofeminist project.

Cosmocentric Worldview

Several ecofeminists converge around the principle of a cosmocentric approach to environmental ethics. In this view human beings are part of a web of creation, not the most important, superior, or dominant being in creation. Embracing a much wider lens than the anthropocentric view of the world often foregrounded in Catholic social teaching, ecofeminists tend to prioritize the importance of the cosmos as a frame to view all creatures. This argument is grounded in the assumption that nature is a living organism that should not be controlled and dominated. Ecofeminists approach cosmology and theology with this view in mind: "ecological solidarity is our covenant with the land, the ocean, the forest, the rivers, and mountains."[87]

The cosmocentric assumptions that animate ecofeminist theory inform a particular theology: God dwells in the world instead of apart from it.[88] God creates and sustains the world; therefore, the natural world can provide the venue for an encounter with the divine. In this incarnational worldview, God is embodied in the very matter of the cosmos.[89] With the Incarnation, God uses the world to communicate Godself to

---

[86] Ibid., 183.

[87] Kwok Pui-lan, "Ecology and the Recycling of Christianity," in *Ecotheology: Voices from the South and North*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 111.

[88] Ruether, *Integrating Ecofeminism*, 124.

creation.[90] This communication points to a relationship of partnership between God and the world. Similarly, ecofeminists stress the responsibility to live in partnership with and not domination over the created world.[91]

Ruether articulates a new way to understand God through a cosmocentric view of creation based on her interpretation of particular biblical themes: God as sustainer of all creation, not just humanity.[92] This view of God has implications for the relationships between humans and the earth. Ruether seeks to recover elements of the biblical tradition that provide a wealth of positive images regarding the relationship between the earth and humanity. The Bible is not a model for the relationship of domination that exists between the earth and human beings.[93] Rather, the Bible presents a valuation of non-human creation in that it is also included in the covenant. God commands care for non-humans in relationship between God, humanity, and the Earth. Within this covenant, unjust relationships must be dismantled and attended to regularly in order to restore the right

---

[90] McFague, *The Body of God*, 150.

[91] Gebara, *Longing for Running Water*, 104-105.

[92] Ruether, "Ecofeminism and Theology" in *Ecotheology: Voices from the South and North*, (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 203; see also Ruether's interpretation of Isaiah 24 where she argues that when the people have lost a sense of reverence for the land, their relationship with God is compromised: "the earth dries up and withers, the world languishes and withers, the heavens languish with the earth. The earth is defiled by its people." (Isaiah, 24) Passages such as these help to create an ecological ethic for justice rooted precisely within the biblical tradition. This passage demonstrates how the natural world served as one venue to exhibit God's presence or absence. In the covenantal vision, the created world acts as the meeting place for humanity and God. A close reading of texts such as Isaiah 24 reveals that the Bible supplies powerful critiques of the false assumptions made regarding the dissonant relationship between religion and ecological care, for more see "The Biblical Vision of the Ecological Crisis" in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, ed. Mary Heather MacKinnon and Moni McIntyre (Kansas City, MO: Sheed & Ward, 1995), 78 – 81.

[93] See for instance Lynn White article referenced in Chapter 1.

relationship to the earth.[94] This concept of covenant becomes an avenue to address the ecological values stemming from a respect for God's creation rooted in the Bible.[95] When the soil of the earth is exploited or the waters of the earth are polluted, Ruether argues that the covenant with God has been broken.[96] She presents an image of what the restoration might look like: there would be just and sustainable use of the things of the earth, "there must be remain an ultimate caveat against reducing animals or plants, soils, or mountains to the status of 'things' under our power."[97]

Ruether also cites the Jubilee concept as an example of biblical ecological justice. "Consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim liberty throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you."[98] This Leviticus passage asserted that the animals and the land should be given a rest every 50 years.[99] In the drive to grow more, develop more, and continually increase the profitability of Earth's resources, this notion has been lost. It is a profit-driven mindset that has led to the commodification of water.

As it is for Ruether, cosmocentrism is also a key concept for McFague. While

---

[94] Ruether, "Ecofeminism and Theology," in *Ecotheology,* 203.

[95] See: Alistair I. Wilson and Jamie A Grant, "Introduction" in *The God of Covenant: Biblical, Theological, and Contemporary Perspectives* ed. Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson (Leicerter, UK: Apollos, 2005); Jurgen Moltmann, "God's Covenant and Our Responsibility" in *The Care of Creation* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 111.

[96] Ruether, "The Biblical vision of the Ecological Crisis," in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*, 78.

[97] Ruether, *Gaia and God*, 227.

[98] Leviticus 25:8

[99] Ruether "Ecofeminism and Theology" in *Eco Theology: Voices from the South and North*, 203.

Ruether relies on biblical sources, McFague describes a theology that sees the earth as the body of God. She argues that care for the earth must occupy our ethical focus because the earth is indeed where the body of God dwells.[100] In her book *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*, she argues for an embodied theology. This embodied approach, she claims, addresses the planetary crisis and all the bodies that are suffering as a result.[101] This move from an anthropocentric to a cosmocentric paradigm is essential for the survival of all beings on Earth. Placing nature at the center of the paradigm its leads to principles rooted in an emphasis on community, justice, and sustainable use of resources.[102] This model is in sharp contrast to the consumer economic model that connects human happiness with spending money and buying things.[103]

McFague argues that a cosmocentric attitude might help Christians depart from a worldview based on consumption and the constant need to amass more material goods. When applied to the harm evident in the view that water is a commodity, McFague's insights are helpful in articulating an alternate view as well as more sustainable consumption habits for water. When water is viewed only as a commodity, it ushers in a mindset of buying and selling water and using whatever is necessary, instead of appreciating the true value of water.

Finally, this cosmocentric worldview leads to a unique understanding of

---

[100] Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1993), vii.

[101] Ibid., vii-viii.

[102] McFague, *Life Abundant*, xii, 82-84, and 90.

[103] McFague, *Life Abundant*, 84.

theological concepts. Gebara argues that the earth can be understood in a Trinitarian fashion, whereby the creative and destructive forces of the earth are all part of a unified life cycle. This Trinitarian view honors the relationships that comprise the Trinity: God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, this concept of the earth as trinity leads to an acceptance of unity within diversity and affirms acceptance of differences rather than prejudice against them.[104] Gebara asks the pointed question about how human beings show concern for others, including the earth, in some ways claiming there is an ecological understanding of Jesus's humanity.[105] Gebara presents a "holistic ecofeminism" that is critical of any theology that imagines God as above or separate from all creation. She says rather that the relationships of the Trinity are essential to the earth: "the earth as Trinity!"[106] It is the relationality expressed in the Trinity that Gebabra uses to describe how humans might relate to the earth. An analogy is helpful here: Imagine God's connection with the earth; the artist and the masterpiece may not be the same thing, but the masterpiece is imbued with the presence, desire, creativity, and genius of the artist. This conviction holds a strong critique of the arrogant assumption, again rooted in the Enlightenment, that human "progress" through use of reason alone must operate separate from a distant and aloof God. This cosmological system posits that God and Jesus are connected to the earth and are not distant, the result of which is a real knowing

[104] Gebara, "The Trinity and Human Experience," in *Woman Healing Earth*, 17.

[105] Gebara, *Longing*, 183.

[106] Ibid., 153.

of the earth as a "living-being" that results in "refraining from manipulating its secrets and destroying it."[107]

In contrast to the narrow view of water that the commodification introduces, I argue that the cosmocentric emphasis in ecofeminism can more properly account for the intrinsic worth of water. Furthermore, a cosmocentric view of water and the functioning of entire Earth systems can more effectively articulate broad social goals, such as equal access to education for men and women, in contrast to the lost hours of education women experience as a result of their water collection responsibilities. These ecofeminist themes - contextual methodology, relationality, responding to the consumer model, and comsocentrism – all call attention to the destructive practices associated with the commodification of the Earth's resources and the corresponding harm to women that sometimes accompanies these practices. They also provide the necessary corrective to Catholic social teaching in that they elevate the status of the earth and the earth's resources to be valued as goods with intrinsic worth, not merely as goods that serve the needs of humanity.

Effects of Commodification of Water on Women: An Ecofeminist Response

The previous chapter addressed why commodification of water harms the earth. Ecofeminsm then, offers a critique of this view of water through the value system it promotes. Ecofeminism is concerned with a cosmocentric, relational harmony to systems of the earth. Therefore the destruction to the streambed in Michigan is deemed unjust through an ecofeminist analysis. It is unjust in that it fails to honor a contextual

[107] Ibid., 157.

worldview. It does not consider the concrete reality of the local river system, harming the life cycle of the stream. Nestle's actions are also harmful through a relational analysis in that it fails to honor the interconnection between humanity and the earth. As a corporation Nestle has not attended to the context and people that surround this Michigan riverbed. A thorough contextual analysis would have proved this location an inadequate place to create a bottling plant based on the principles in ecofeminism.

As a contextual theory ecofeminism seeks to respond to the concrete issues women and ecosystems experience. Thus, it is at root concerned with survival. However, this survival extends to all species, but with a specific concern for women and the earth.[108] As my project has laid out, there is nothing so basic and necessary for survival as water. When people are dying due to inadequate water, ecofeminism demands change. When ecosystems are dying as a result of large dams, pollution, bottling facilities, ecofeminism demands change. Shiva argues that the earth is dying, the forests, soil, waters, and air of the earth are threatened, and thus the livelihood of all creation is in danger.[109] From this context, particular claims emerge which challenge systems which have continually harmed and devalued nature and women. Instead of valuing water for its profit, for instance, ecofeminists honor waters true context and claim that water is a source for life and as it is threatened so too is our survivial.

In affirming the interdependence and interrelationality of all humanity,

---

[108] Andrea Moraes and Patricia Perkins, "Deliberative Water Management: Women's Experience in Brazil," in *Eco-Sufficiency*, 149.

[109] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, xv.

ecofeminism can critique the pollution and diversion of water that comprises the commodity view of water. Recognizing that humans are more than merely consumers and that water is far more than just a commodity, ecofeminism supports a "cosmic interwovenness" that affirms a "wholesome, harmonious, and compassionate web of relationships."[110] These relationships are based on justice. They are grounded on principles of fairness, respect, and dignity. Thus woven into the very fabric of the theory is an authentic critique of anything that isolates human beings and Earth's resources, severing them from the web of relationality that is a component of justice. The whole premise of ecofeminism rests upon the affirmation that within this interdependent web of life there is a unique partnership that exists between humans and nature. From this partnership certain practices flow, such that one could argue against "cutting forests and damming rivers that make people and wildlife in floodplains more vulnerable."[111] These are practices that honor the web of relationality that exists between human beings and nature, such that harming one part of the web has ripple effects throughout. Damming rivers, diverting water, must be viewed through this wider lens to account for the proper time and place to create dams. A dam can be used in a positive way when it works with the natural cycle of water. This interdependence calls into question the patriarchal relationships that have dominated the market place for centuries and calls for

---

[110] Chung Hyun Kyung, "Ecology, Feminism and African and Asian Spirituality" in *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North,* 177.

[111] Carolyn Merchant, *Radical Ecology: The Search for Livable World,* Second Edition (New York, NY: 2005),196-7.

restructuring of the domination of "women and nature inherent in the market economy's use of both as resources."[112]

Most Christian ethicists would agree that persons are more than consumers. To this assumption I add that water must be seen as more than a consumable good. Water, viewed through an ecofeminist lens, is more than a resource which can be commodified. It exists within the context of the entire web of creation. Although there may be times that water is bought and sold, and at times this may be the best way to manage water, this cannot be the only practice through which to understand, appreciate, and care for this precious combination of hydrogen and oxygen. Ecofeminism presents tools and resources to overturn the "economic and social hierarchies that turn all aspects of life into a market society."[113] Seeking to uncover the oppressive nature of capitalism and patriarchy so that women and Earth's resources do not have to be further commodified, ecofeminism does present a robust critique of valuing water only as a commodity. Furthermore, ecofeminism values water as a source of all life and the sustainer of creation.

As a cosmocentric theory, ecofeminism places the good of the earth at its center, but what flows from this is the good of all humanity, in particular those already marginalized. Each of these themes also further serves to correct the anthropocentric views within the Catholic tradition. Viewing nature as a partner, as a part of the web of creation that both humans and non-humans belong too does seem to offer a wider lens that the traditional Catholic approach to nature. When nature is seen as a partner there is

---

[112] Ibid., 197.

[113] Ibid., 206.

less room for these assumptions and rather everyone is equal, working together for the improvement of all creation.

Not only can ecofeminism critique the practices that flow from a commodified view of water, it responds also to the way women are harmed in this commodified approach to water. This project has already argued for the inadequacy of the market to account for the good of the environment, so here I add another layer, the market fails to recognize the undue burden commodification places on women in regards to their access to water. In this section I look to the privatization of water, to argue that this practice only further harms women and perpetuates stereotypes of a patriarchal worldview which dominates women and nature. The commodification of water brings with it the implicit idea that water can be valued through a monetary lens, which fails to account for many of the monetary neutral water uses that women embrace. This dual domination of women and nature exists in a market economy, and is evidenced in the commodification of water.[114]

The market is certainly poised to do some things very well, in terms of ways of promoting efficient individual decision making, allowing for choice and flexibility around goods. However, the market does not and cannot account for "broad social goals."[115] Alleviating the gender hierarchies and unfair limitations placed on women due to their role in water management is not something that the market has any ability to

---

[114] Ibid., 197.

[115] Stephen Thompson, *Water Use, Management, and Planning in the United States*, 151.

account for, which is why ecofeminist theory can present some alternative ways to value water. Commodification of water harms women acutely as it problematizes a women's access to water by introducing market mechanisms to secure access to water, and at the same time creates practices which harm the earth.

When water is privatized, the power of ownership of the water is transferred from local communities to private corporations. Women are responsible for eighty percent of the water work throughout the globe. As companies buy water rights, women have less power and no voice in determining how to access, secure and provide water for their families.[116] A privatized view of water often fails to account for the concrete knowledge that many women have regarding water. Maude Barlow argues that women must be recognized as major stakeholders in the management of water for any new water regulations to take effect and have an impact.

When water is privatized and viewed through the lens of commodification, women often lose access to the traditional ways they have secured water, which have often involved "informal or customary arrangements."[117] Once an economic lens is introduced community elites will garner access to the water that once was traditionally accessible to all. These elites do not often consider the needs of women and children

---

[116] Maude Barlow and Tony Clark, *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water* (New York: New Press, 2002), 161.

[117] Leila Harris and Whitney Gantt, "Gender and Shifting Water Governance: Differential Effects of Privatization, Commodification, and Democratization" in USAID *Tenure Brief*, (Madison, WI: Land Tenure Center, No. 6, August, 2007), 6.

when there is a shift toward a commodification schema for valuing water.[118] Before the modern use of privatization of land and resources emerged members of a community together shared the management and care for these resources. The loss of this "community resource management" has taken the traditional role women often had toward in managing Earth's resources and given it to private corporations.[119] Finally, women had found ways to use nature's systems (plant based purification for example) to provide clean safe water for their families. Since private engineers have begun to replace women's role around water, fewer people have access even to the minimal needs for drinking water.[120]

Also when water is viewed as an economic good, there is an inherent focus on water's productive purposes. This focus further marginalizes domestic or non-market uses of water which tend to fall in a women's domain.[121] Leila Harris and Whitney Gantt argue that "unequal gendered access to resources may be perpetuated and legitimated by introducing market mechanisms into the water sector."[122] The value of water for market users and produces, for example a commercial farmer, will often win out over the value of water for a local women in a small village such as the Marshall Islands. Similarly, since the value of water as productive is often separated from women's knowledge of

---

[118] Ibid., 6.

[119] Aruna Gnanadasan, "Women, Economy and Ecology," in *Ecotheology*, 180.

[120] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 213.

[121] Harris and Gnatt, "Gender and Shifting Water Governance," 5.

[122] Ibid., 5

water, the value that women have regarding the resources of nature is often displaced along with the eroding value for women's activities.[123]

Similarly, a market-orientated view toward water advocates for the production of large dams in order to secure more forms of affordable energy. The increase in dams affects those already marginalized as well as the health and well-being of the earth. Aruna Gnanadason, a feminist theologian, claims that these large dams will affect women most as "they are the ones who must deal with shortages of water and food that result," from the devastation and environmental problems often associated with these dams.[124] Shiva refers to dams as "violence to rivers," and claims that they are part of the patriarchal, western paradigm of water management.[125] Large dams are violent in that they are not concerned with nature's processes, but rather "processes of revenue and profit generation."[126] Shiva says that building dams creates colonization of people, but also of rivers.[127] Shiva's statement about dams tend to deal with dams that fail to recognize the natural cycle and flow of water.

Ecofeminism and an Alternative View of Water

Ecofeminism articulates an alternate view of the resources found in nature which can inform a more just value system for water. In particular ecofeminism actually builds

---

[123] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 5.

[124] Gnanadason, "Women," in *Ecotheology*, 182.

[125] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 184.

[126] Ibid., 186.

[127] Shiva, *Water Wars*, 53.

on some of the ideas presented in the biblical theology of water by placing emphasis on the inherent goodness of creation not only as a gift from God, but also as a dwelling place for God. Further, some of the strength of ecofeminism is in its ability to provide the necessary corrective to some of the anthropocentrism within Catholic social teaching thereby articulating a new value system for water.

The cosmocentric ethical demands found within ecofeminism elevate the intrinsic value of water. Water has an import beyond the commodity value which humans ascribe to it. Water cannot be separated from the ecosystems which it is a part of in order to create a system which supports only human needs for water. An ecofeminist value of water understands water within the whole Earth ecosystem. It sees water as part of creation which humanity is in partnership with, is dependent on, and cannot survive without. While the commodity view of nature sees water as an independent good, an ecofeminist view recognizes the web of creation which functions in and around water. Similarly, the ecofeminist view honors the contextual reality within which gendered hierarchies exist in terms of access to water for women. In order to correct this, an ecofeminist view of water argues for more equitable policies and protective measures to safeguard water for all. Instead of allowing a market mechanism to regulate the scarcity of water, the ecofeminist view understands the various values attributed to water and affirms that water cannot be limited to an economic marker to determine its worth.

While critiquing the inadequacy of the dominant economic model, ecofeminists urge for a return to more sustainable ways to value resources, such as water. Recognizing that in the drive to maximize profit through development and the expansion of the

capitalist market system harmed the natural world destroying the "natural resource base for the production and sustenance of survival."[128] As water systems were impaired permanently, so too was women's productivity as it was often connected to the sustainable and just management of resources such as land and water. Since the market can serve to fragment people and nature and view people and nature as things, it is the ecofeminist voice that critiques this model and presents the affirmation that water is a living part of the web of creation and women are man are equal and should be valued as such in any operate model of society.

More than just affirming God's presence in the earth, an ecofeminist value of water can be used to claim that God is present in water, thereby denouncing harmful water practices. Gebara actually claims that we can hardly even imagine "springs of pure water" today given the ecological ruin and pollution that composes our current reality.[129] Affirming living waters that might be a symbol for hope, for life, might lead to practices that love the earth and earth's resources. Gebara concludes her book with this plea:

> To seek living waters is to prefigure our hope…And the living water is life itself since its very beginning, since its primordial reality, since its origins still present in ourselves.[130]

Water is life. Water was one of the first things God created. Water connects God with God's creation and the need to associate this sacred and profound reality of water is affirmed in ecofeminism.

---

[128] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 3.

[129] Gebara, *Longing*, 197.

[130] Ibid., 215.

Conclusion

Stories from within the Bible, in particular Genesis and Psalms, present a particular view of water: water as a sacred good of creation, as a gift from God, and as a chaotic and necessary life-sustaining force of nature. These biblical themes highlight the inadequacy of a view for water that values water only as a commodity. When water is separated from its role in nature, its sacred connotation, and its import for biological functions, the monetary valued placed on it does not represent its integrated value. The Bible reveals one presentation of the multi-layered values and functions of water.

Catholic social teaching also provides helpful tools to flesh out a more accurate and representative view of water. Using the concept of the common good similarly serves to critique the narrow approach to water as merely a commodity and point to the greater value and importance of the significance of water as something that sustains the planetary common good. Ecofeminism embraces a cosmocentric worldview honoring relationships of mutuality which expands the language of the Bible and Catholic social teaching to the concrete needs of the world today especially as it relates to the commodification of water.

Finally ecofeminism provides the most adequate response to the commodification of water in that it embraces the previous themes: an implicit care for God's creation as well as an intentional focus on the planetary common good. However, it develops these ideas in a contextual method that takes seriously the current signs of the times. The water crisis has already been established as one of the gravest humanitarian problems of our era. Commodification of water has worsened the crisis in that it has created a false sense of ownership over water. Ecofeminsm presents a theory and

concrete measures which invite humanity to live in greater partnership not only with other human beings, but with the Earth, with ecosystems, creatures, and the natural cycles of water. While critiquing the concepts which have turned the world into a large shopping mall, ecofeminism supports relationships built on justice, interdependence, and mutuality with all creation.

CONCLUSION

> An economy respectful of the environment will not have maximization of profits as its only objective, because environmental protection cannot be assured solely on the basis of financial calculations of costs and benefits. The environment is one of those goods that cannot be adequately safeguarded or promoted by market forces. Every country, in particular developed countries, must be aware of the urgent obligation to reconsider the way that natural goods are being used. Seeking innovative ways to reduce the environmental impact of production and consumption of goods should be effectively encouraged.[1]

Just water will exist when water is valued for its own worth and not the value it produces on the market, in a bottle, or for the energy it might create. Just water defies the commodious value our consumer society has ascribed to it. Just water will function well within the planetary common good and also maintain the good of ecosystems which nourish and support the earth. Just water will be respected as a conduit for God; in all its mystery, chaos, and sustaining power. Just water will be accessible for all, those on the margins, ecosystems which the market ignores, and especially women.

In this project I have described how water is valued as a commodity today. Valuing water as a commodity leads to a host of problems with the pollution of, sale of, and diversion of water. Many of these practices that I describe are not inherently bad in and of themselves, but when stem from the commodity value system of water, they have the potential to cause harm. Ultimately the commodity view of water falsely allows human beings to think that they own water. However, water should not be owned but rather appreciated as the lifeblood of the earth. The longer humanity works under the assumption that they have the power control water the more devastating the impact of this view becomes.

---

[1] *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 470.

I have turned to the Bible as the first place to ground an alternative view of water. This choice is impacted by the theological appreciation for water which I find in Genesis and Psalms. I also argue throughout that the biblical appreciation for water is one in which the human being lives in partnership with the earth and the earth's waters. The biblical authors present both the destructive and the life-giving capabilities of water and the corresponding posture of humility which humanity might maintain in managing water.

Next I investigate the rich tradition within the Catholic social teaching to highlight a pertinent theme – the common good – as applicable to the injustice which stems from the commodification of water. However, I expand the common good in order to fully encompass the good of not only the earth but all of the creatures that cohabitate here. This planetary common good then becomes the frame through which to critique the commodification of water, as a practice which I argue can detract from the affirmation that water is a human right, but also since it harms the overall good of the earth.

Finally I look to ecofeminism to respond to the commodification of water that further aggravates the hardships women face surrounding water.[2] Women already are victim of hierarchical and patriarchal practices around water. In most parts of the world men make the decision around water, even though it is women who interact with and handle the day-to-day management of water for their families. As water is commodified women's access to and control of water has typically deteriorated and as a result the well-

[2] Karen Bauer, "Women and Water" in *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice*, 18:465-467, 466.

being of millions has suffered. Ecofeminism responds to contextual injustices such as these by unpacking the unfair gender dynamics that have impacted women and the earth. I use ecofeminism to critique the commodification of water and also to help expand the anthropomorphic focus of the Catholic social teaching tradition.

The alternate perspective to the commodity view of water is one that values water as an intrinsic good. The prescription for transitioning from the commodity view to respect for water as an intrinsic good is found in changing values. This change in values is what will inform new ways to understand water and protect earth's waters which are in great need of help at present. Ultimately new guidelines must emerge for supporting the natural processes and ecosystems which water sustains as opposed to halting the natural flow of water thereby threatening the entire ecosystem which we know as Earth.

While my project in this dissertation focuses on values and attitudes surrounding water, I am hopeful that this may result ultimately in changed practices surrounding the use of water. I imagine these would be guidelines that can populate science textbooks, ecological and ethical textbooks, and also circulate within religious contexts of parishes and social justice groups connected with various pastoral programs. Theologians and religious communities will not be able to dictate policy change, but they are a strong and effective voice when they advocate for certain changes at the local, national, and international governing levels.[3] This type of legislative advocacy is where the sheer

[3] For examples of policy change that theologians and ethicists might encourage, support, and advocate for see for example Lestor Brown, *World on Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse* (New York: W & W Norton and Company, 2011). On the Chapter "Falling Water Tables and Shrinking Harvests" Brown argues that we must increase "water productivity," one such way to do this is to remove

number of Catholics could have the greatest impact in working toward "just water," and presenting a more adequate value system for water. Any way for theologians to encourage and to support this type of action would be worthwhile and help in the overall commitment to inviting the church into greater dialogue with the needs and "signs of our time."

A shift in perspective surrounding water may lead to more responsible water usage practices. It is this new value system, supported by a biblical theology of water, Catholic social teaching, and ecofeminism that can help situate water within its wider, bigger context. Water, appreciated more authentically is understood for its role in maintaining Earth's ecosystems. Water becomes much more than a commodity, a substance that runs through our taps, the combination of hydrogen and oxygen – water is life, and the proper reference for water supports this affirmation.

These guidelines that flow from this more authentic valuing of water would include simple steps to alter how people interact with water in their daily lives.[4]

---

the water subsidies that keep water well below cost in the U.S. (150) He argues that by increasing the price of water in the U.S. people will be encouraged to use water more efficiently (172). This pricing argument is seen in other scholars such as Alex Prud'homme in *The Ripple Effect* who also states that we must price water accordingly to reflect its scarcity (388).

[4] See for example Pabich, *Taking on Water,* who presents several helpful water charts in the Afterward section of her book. These are the tools I see theologians embracing as we connect water justice to the idea of responsibility in the Christian tradition. She presents charts such as a "Water Cheat Sheet" with recommendations for actions to decrease water usage in everyday life such as eat less meat, waste less food, fix leaks, etc.; a "Water Savings" chart which details actions such as using water efficient appliances; the "Annual Water Footprint of the Average American Diet," and finally the "Water Footprints of Representative Foods." Charts such as these are what I envision coupled with the theological discussion of the injustice and devastating statistics around the water crisis. These charts (and many like them exist on the internet) are able to show the reality that little changes people make in their everyday life have an impact.

Individuals may better understand the excessive use of water in some regions of the world verses the dire scarcity in other regions. Understanding individual water footprints and encouraging institutions to know how much water is consumed are necessary in framing actions toward a paradigm which presents responsible water habits and values.[5] Small acts, such as turning off the water while brushing one's teeth, are the type of actions that can lead to larger changes in time. Encouraging the use of filtration systems in offices and homes instead of purchasing bottled water can cash out in large movements away from the waste and cost that goes into bottled water. Or, committing to drink tap water instead of bottled water can start as a small decision and then lead to greater actions such as Loyola University's recent ban on the sale of bottled water mentioned earlier. McFague addresses this idea of seemingly simple acts of change which have great potential. "Our small acts of resistance, of saying no to more, of refusing to go with the crowd, will not save the world, but they can help us see the material needs of others as our spiritual task."[6] Her idea demonstrates how small acts which justly value water are the starting point for truly honoring the water needs of the global community.[7]

---

[5] For example of websites that address this concept of water usage see: "Reducing Footprints" on *Water is Life* at: http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/freshwater/about-freshwater-initiative/, accessed March 1, 2013; Water Footprint Network: http://www.waterfootprint.org/?page=files/home, accessed March 3, 2013; Water Use Calculator at *Save Our Water*: http://www.saveourh2o.org/water-use-calculator, accessed March 3, 2013.

[6] McFague, *New Climate*, 157.

[7] It is clear that merely raising awareness is not enough since action is needed once the facts are presented. Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone argue in *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in without Going Crazy* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2012) that "environmental and social change organizations often fall into the trap of assuming that if only people knew how bad things were they would begin tackling the issues." However, they maintain that people are so overwhelmed with the evidence and so more is needed,

Finally, this new value system for water must rely on an awareness of the role relationality plays in understanding how humanity cares for and honors creation. Sallie McFague puts it best when stating that human beings exist only in "interrelationship and interdependence" and it is crucial to recognize that people exist "only because of other things."[8] McFague's insight is helpful in highlighting the fact that both religion and ecology see right relationships and inter-dependency at their center. It is these insights around this delicate "web of life" which might invite people to "see differently."[9] Water, understood as life, changes the way we see and understand water. Daming a river becomes a different practice when we connect it with killing a river, which is what large dams have the ability to do.[10] Seeing and valuing water differently is what will ultimately frame water as much more than an economic good.

One such example that highlights the justice issues at stake in how we value water is seen between the Coca-Cola plant and local farmers in Rajesthan, India, which I referred to in previous chapters.[11] PBS News Hour addresses the way activists have taken issues such as this one and forced Coca-Cola to address their water usage and become "water neutral" meaning they do not take more water than they contribute back to the

---

70. This is where I see the role of the theologian as so crucial, since we can help make sense of the information around the water crisis and connect it to a theological method for reflection and action.

[8] McFague, *New Climate*, 148.

[9] Ibid., 150-153.

[10] Shiva, *Staying Alive*, 180-190.

[11] PBS, *NewsHour*, "Water Wars," December 2008, accessed March 8, 2013, http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/asia/july-dec08/waterwars_11-17.html.

environment. However, situations like this exist around the globe and corporations such as Coca-Cola always have more power and money to address their needs than local communities.[12]

Beyond stating that water is a human right, the just water ethic upholds the goodness of water as a good in and of itself. The famous ecologist Aldo Leopold extends ethics to "the land" claiming, "the land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land."[13] Religion is well suited to respond to the ecological crisis as it has the ability to invite communities to subscribe to an alternative worldview, one that values water as a resource worthy of protection.[14] The solution to ecological injustice is not found in simply recycling; instead, a sustainable and just response requires a conversion in the underlying beliefs and assumptions that comprise an integrated way of seeing the world.[15] Such a

---

[12] For more on corporations verses local water users see: Shiva, *Water Wars*, especially Chapter 4, "The World Bank, the WTO, and Corporate Control Over Water;" Barlow, *Blue Covenant*, especially Chapter 2 "Setting the Stage for Corporate Control of Water;" and Joseph L. Sax, "Understanding Transfers: Community Rights and the Privatization of Water," in *Water Ethics*, 117-124.

[13] Aldo Leopold, "The Land Ethic" from *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1949).

[14] Alex Prud'homme argues in *The Ripple Effect: The Fate of Fresh Water in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Scirbner, 2011) that in order to "forestall an emergency, we must redefine how we think of water and how we use it." Further, "we must learn to treat deceptively simple water for what it really is; the most valuable resource on earth," 360. This is where the theologian can work with the reality and help imagine new ways to relate to water and redefine how we interact with it and the entire Earth community.

[15] See Peter Gleick's article "Questions and Answers with Peter Gleick," where he states: "I've spent a lot of time thinking about what I call the soft path for water, which is a more comprehensive way of thinking about water policy and management. The soft path doesn't mean no infrastructure; it means smarter and more effective infrastructure. It also means rethinking demand and efficiency. The good news is that there is potential for improving water efficiency in every sector of the economy. Anywhere we use water, we could do the things we want by using less water," see: http://www.pacinst.org/press_center/press_releases/PNAS_Gleick_QnA.pdf, accessed March 2, 2013.

conversion in this context means shifting from the belief that we are isolated individuals to the acknowledgment that we are related to and connected to all species on the planet. The conversion mandates new practices and habits around valuing and conserving water, and appreciating water as much more than just a commodity. Honoring the complexity of the relationships that surround water, working to reconcile the places where grave harm exists in the water crisis, and ensuring responsibility when addressing global water issues all comprise the new worldview that is so necessary for water justice to exist.

A New Paradigm

Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza states in an interview located at the beginning of *Toward a new Heaven and a New Earth,* "I want a new earth and I want it passionately. It would be that everybody would have enough to live, everybody would have their dignity, everyone would be able to do what they want to do."[16] Speaking as one of the most prolific feminists of our time, she articulates what I see moving at the heart of ecofeminism, a true desire for a paradigm shift that brings about a new earth. Fioerenza states it is an earth where everybody has enough, and this most certainly includes water. And equally important, is the recognition of human dignity that this new earth would enable all to experience. Central to feminism, ecofeminism, and Catholicism, this human dignity is key to the new paradigm. Commodification of water detracts from the dignity of creatures, since access to water is problematized.

---

[16] Fernando F. Segovia, "Looking Back, Looking Around, Looking Ahead: An Interview with Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza" in *Toward a New Heaven and Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 26.

This new paradigm, then, embraces a vision of mutual respect for all human beings and safeguards the dignity of all species and ecosystems. Bringing this vision of water justice to reality will require different action steps from different people and organizations. For someone in my context it might require forming new habits around water usage, such as banning water bottles, using water efficient appliances, and trying to decrease the amount of water used on a daily basis. For the Church, it might mean stretching beyond its own teachings to embrace practices and insights from others, specifically feminists and ecologists.

Just water, then, is the culmination of my integration of the Bible, Catholic social teaching, and ecofeminism. It is my attempt at offering ideas that might help with the mobilization of millions of Christians across the globe. To combat the ecological crisis around us great efforts are needed, but small ones too will be a part of the response. The next steps which flow from this project, then, surround the idea of raising awareness to the commodification of water and educating people about some of the harmful practices therein. Concretely this education would lead to more responsible usages for water. It would also help create more authentic value systems for water.

The Marshallese poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, articulates the intimate relationship the Marshallese people experience with water.

> tell them about the water
> how we have seen it rising
> flooding across our cemeteries
> gushing over the sea walls
> and crashing against our homes

tell them what it's like
to see the entire ocean level with the land.[17]

In response to Jetnil-Kijiner's poem, it is my hope that more theologians will tell "them" (their Christian communities) about the water that is lapping their seawalls and washing away their graves and destroying their homeland. Theologians will discuss the paradigm shift necessary to embrace the just water ethic and respond socio-ecological challenges. Ethicists are able to mine the rich water symbolism and usage within the Christian tradition and connect this to a robust sense of justice needed in our world today. This will help engage millions in the struggle for water justice and ultimately find a more expansive value system for water than one that claims water is just a commodity. Theologians can help respond to the concluding words in Jetnil-Kijiner's poem: "but most importantly tell them we don't want to leave, we've never wanted to leave, and that we are nothing without our islands."[18] Failure to adequately honor water is what is causing harm to the planet Earth and creating environmental refugees globally. The time to act is now. The biblical, Catholic, and ecofeminist agenda have set a course of responsible guidelines to inform our actions.

[17] an excerpt from "Tell Them" by Marshallese Poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner, accessed December 10, 2012, for entire poem see: http://jkijiner.wordpress.com/2011/04/13/tell-them/

[18] Ibid.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Akiwumi, Fenda A. "Indigenous People, Women and Water: The Importance of Local Knowledge for Project Planning in an African Context." In *Greener Management International*, Summer 2003.

Anderson, Bernhard W., ed. *Creation in the Old Testament*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Translated by Terence Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985.

Barlow, Maude. *Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water*. New York: The New Press, 2007.

Barlow, Maude and Tony Clarke. *Blue Gold: The Fight to Stop the Corporate Theft of the World's Water*. New York: New Press, 2002.

Baxter, Brian. *A Theory of Ecological Justice*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Bergman, Roger. *Catholic Social Learning: Educating the Faith That Does Justice*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011.

Berry, R. J., ed. *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000.

Berry, Thomas. *The Great Work.* New York: Bell Tower Publishing, 1999.

Berryman, Phillip. *Liberation Theology: The Essential Facts About the Revolutionary Movement in Latin America and Beyond*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1987.

Bennett, Vivienne. "Gender, Class, and Water: Women and Politics of Water Service in Monterrey, Mexico." in Latin American Perspectives, Issue 85, Vol. 22 No. 2, Spring, 1995.

Birch, Charles, William Eakin, and Jay B. McDaniel, eds. *Liberating Life: Contemporary Approaches to Ecological Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1990.

Boadt, Lawrence and Mark S. Smith, eds. *Imagery and Imagination in Biblical Literature: Essay in Honor of Aloysius Fitzgerald, F.S.C.*. Washington, D.C.: The Catholic Biblical Association of America, 2001.

Boff, Leonardo. *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*. Translated by Phillip Berryman. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997.

Boff, Leonardo and Clodovis Boff. *Introducing Liberation Theology*. Translated by Paul Burns. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1987.

Brennan, Andrew. *Thinking about Nature: An Investigation of Nature, Value and Ecology*. Athens: University of Georgia, 1988.

Brown, Lester, R. *Plan B 3.0: Mobilizing to Save Civilization*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008.

Brown, Peter G. and Jeremy J Schmidt. *Water Ethics: Foundational Readings for Students and Professionals*. Washington, D.C.: Islands Press, 2010

Brown, Robert McAfee. *Unexpected News: Reading the Bible with Third World Eyes*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984.

Burghardt, Walter J. *Justice: A Global Adventure*. New York: Orbis Books, 2004.

Carr, Paul. "Sacramental Water and the Challenge of Global Warming" in *Water and Religion*, 2001.

Carl, Ann-Cathrin. *In Justice: Women and Global Economics.* Minneapolis: Fortess Press, 2003.

Cahill, Lisa Sowle. "Feminist Ethics, Differences, and Common Ground: A Catholic Perspective." in *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition. New York: Paulist Press, 1996.*

Chamberlain, Gary L. *Troubled Waters: Religion, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis.* New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008.

Christiansen, Drew and Walter Grazer. *"And God Saw That It Was Good": Catholic Theology and the Environment*. Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1996.

Clowney, David and Patricia Mosto. Earthcare: *An Anthology in Environmental Ethics*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009.

Coles, Robert. *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion*. Reading: Perseus Books, 1987.

Cordourier-Real, Carlos R. *Transnational Social Justice*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

Coward, Harold and Daniel C. Maguire. *Visions of a New Earth: Religious Perspectives on Population, Consumption, and Ecology*. Albany: State University of New York, 2000.

Cramme, Olaf and Patrick Diamond, eds. *Social Justice in the Global Age*. Malden, MA: Polity, 2009.

Crosby, Donald A. and Charley D. Hardwick, eds. *Religious Experience and Ecological Responsibility*. New York: Peter Lang, 1996.

Cullen, Philomena, Bernard Hoose, and Gerard Mannion, eds. *Catholic Social Justice: Theological and Practical Explorations*. New York: T & T Clark, 2007.

Curran, Charles E., Margaret A. Farley, and Richard A. McCormick, eds. *Feminist Ethics and the Catholic Moral Tradition*. New York: Paulist, 1996.

Curry, Patrick. *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*. Malden, Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2006.

Day, Linda and Carolyn Pressler, eds. *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Deane-Drummond, Celia. *Eco-Theology*. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2008.

De La Torre, Miguel. *Doing Christian Ethics from the Margins*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004.

Delio, Ilia, O.S.F., Keith Douglass Warner, O.F.M., and Pamela Wood. *Care for Creation: A Franciscan Spirituality of the Earth*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 2008.

DeCrane, Susanne M. *Aquinas, Feminism, and the Common Good*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2004.

Diamond, Irene and Gloria Feman Orenstein, eds. *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990.

Dobson, Andrew. *Justice and the Environment: Conceptions of Environmental Sustainability and Dimensions of Social Justice*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

Dorr, Donal. *Option for the Poor: A Hundred Years of Vatican Social Teaching* (revised edition). Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1992.

Dowd, Michael. *Earthspirit: A Handbook for Nurturing an Ecological Christianity*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991.

Downing, Jane, Dirk H.R. Spennemann, and Margaret Bennett, eds. *Bwebwenatoon Etto: A Collection of Marshallese Legends and Traditions*. Majuro: Republic of the Marshall Islands: Historic Preservation Office, 1992.

Eaton, Heather. *Introducing Ecofeminist Theologies*. New York: T & T Clark International, 2005.

Eaton, Heather and Lois Ann Lorentzen, eds. *Ecofeminsm and Globalization: Exploring Culture, Context, and Religion*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003.

Edwards, Denis, ed. *Earth Revealing – Earth Healing: Ecology and Christian Theology*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2001.

Fewell, Danna Nolan and David M. Gunn. *Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler. *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*. New York: Crossroad, 1983.

Fiorenza, Elisabeth Schussler, ed. *The Power of Naming: A Concilium Reader in Feminist Liberation Theology*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996.

Foster, Claire. *Sharing God's Planet: A Christian Vision for a Sustainable Future.* London: Church House Publishing, 2005.

Fragomeni, Richard N. and John T. Pawlikowski, eds. *The Ecological Challenge: Ethical, Liturgical, and Spiritual Responses*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1994.

Frymer-Kensky, Tikva. *In the Wake of the Goddesses*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1992.

Gebara, Ivone. *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999.

Gebara, Ivone. *Out of the Depths: Women's Experience of Evil and Salvation*. Translated by Ann Patrick Ware. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002.

Gibson, William E., ed. *Eco-Justice – The Unfinished Journey*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004.

Gnanakan, Ken. *God's World: A Theology of the Environment*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1999.

Goizueta, Roberta S., *Caminos con Jesus: Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment.* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1995.

Golden, Renny. *The Hour of the Poor, the Hour of Women: Salvadoran Women Speak*. New York: Crossroad, 1991.

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1987.

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation*. Translated and edited by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1973.

Habel, Norman C., ed. *The Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2001.

Haight, Roger. *An Alternative Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology*. New York: Paulist, 1985.

Hallman, David G., editor. *Ecotheology: Voices from the South and North*. New York: Maryknoll, 1994.

Har-El, Menashe. *Landscape, Nature, and Man in the Bible: Sites and Events in the Old Testament*. Jerusalem: Carta, 2003.

Haring, Bernard. *The Sacraments and Your Everyday Life*. Liguori: Liguori Publications, 1976.

Hart, John. *Sacramental Commons: Christian Ecological Ethics*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (2nd edition). Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

Haughey, John C., ed. *The Faith That Does Justice: Examining the Christian Sources for Social Change*. New York: Paulist, 1977.

Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics*. New York: Harper Collins, 1996.

Heagle, John. *Justice Rising: The Emerging Biblical Vision*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010.

Hellwig, Monika K. *Understanding Catholicism*. New York: Paulist, 1981.

Heschel, Abraham J. *The Prophets*. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.

Hessel, Dieter T. and Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Christianity and Ecology*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Hessel, Dieter T., ed. *Theology for Earth Community: A Field Guide*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996.

Hester, R. E. and R. M. Harrison, eds. *Sustainable Water*. Cambridge: The Royal Society of Chemistry, 2011.

Himes, Kenneth R., ed. *Modern Catholic Social Teaching: Commentaries and Interpretations*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2005.

Hogue, Michael S. *The Tangled Bank: Toward and Ecotheological Ethics of Responsible Participation.* Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2008.

Hollenbach, SJ, David. *The Common Good and Christian Ethics.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Hollenbach, SJ, David. "Modern Catholic Teachings Concerning Justice" in *The Faith That Does Justice.* Edited by John Haughey. New York: Paulist Press, 1977.

Hornsby-Smith, Michael P. *An Introduction to Catholic Social Thought.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Jarl, Ann-Cathrin. *In Justice: Women and Global Economics*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003.

Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*. New York: Paulist Press, 1993.

Jonas, Hans. *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1984.

Kheel, Marti. *Nature Ethics: An Ecofeminist Perspective*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

Koenig-Bricker, Woodeene. *Ten Commandments for the Environment: Pope Benedict XVI Speaks Out for Creation and Justice*. Notre Dame: Ave Maria, 2009.

Krier Mich, Marvin L. *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*. Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998.

LaChance, Albert J. and John E. Carroll, eds. *Embracing the Earth: Catholic Approaches to Ecology*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994.

Lahari-Dutt, Kuntala, editor. *Fluid Bonds: Views on Gender and Water*. Kolkata, India: Mandira Sen, 2006.

Lawler, Michael G. *What Is and What Ought to Be: The Dialectic of Experience, Theology, and Church*. New York: Continuum, 2005.

Lebacqz, Karen. *Six Theories of Justice*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986.

Lewis, Tania and Emily Potter, eds. *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2011.

Lotter, H.P.P. *Justice for an Unjust Society*. Atlanta: Rodopi, 1993.

Lovelock, James. *The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning*. New York: Basic Books, 2009.

MacKinnon, Mary Heather and Moni McIntyre, editors. *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology.* Kansas City: Shed & Ward, 1995.

Marks, William E. *The Holy Order of Water: Healing Earth's Waters and Ourselves*. Great Barrington, MA: Bell Pond Books, 2001.

Marlow, Hilary. *Biblical Prophets and Contemporary Environmental Ethics: Re-Reading Amos, Hosea, and First Isaiah*. Oxford: Oxford University, 2009.

Martin-Schramm, James and Robert Stivers. *Christian Environmental Ethics: A Case Method Approach*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003.

Mascarenhas, Michael. "Where the Waters Divide: First Nations, Tainted Water and Environmental Justice in Canada" in *Local Environment*. December 2007

Massaro, S.J. Thomas. *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action* (classroom edition). New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008.

McBrien, Richard P. *Catholicism* (Study Edition). New York: Harper & Row, 1981.

McCormick, Richard A. *Corrective Vision: Explorations in Moral Theology*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1994.

McDaniel, Jay B. *With Roots and Wings: Christianity in an Age of Ecology and Dialogue*. New York: Orbis Books, 1995.

McDonagh, Sean. *Passion for the Earth: The Christian Vocation to Promote Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994.

McDougal, Dorothy C. *The Cosmos as the Primary Sacrament: The Horizon for and Ecological Sacramental Theology*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2003.

McDuff, Mallory. *Natural Saints: How People of Faith Are Working to Save God's Earth.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

McFague, Sallie. *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.

McFague, Sallie. *Life Abundant: Rethinking Theology and Economy for a Planet in Peril*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

McFague, Sallie. *A New Climate for Theology: God, the World, and Global Warming*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008.

McFague, Sallie. *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature.* Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997.

McFague, Sallie. *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God In Religious Language.* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1982.

Merchant, Carolyn. *Earthcare: Women and the Environment*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Mich, Marvin L. Krier. *Catholic Social Teaching and Movements*. Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998.

Mies, Maria and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1993.

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. Edited by George Sher. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979.

Miller, Richard W., ed. *God, Creation, and Climate Change: A Catholic Response to the Environmental Crisis*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2010.

Miranda, Jose Porfirio. *Marx and the Bible: A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression*. Translated by John Eagleson. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1974.

Moore, Kathleen Dean and Michael P. Nelson, eds. *Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril*. San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2010.

Mott, Stephen Charles. *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (2nd edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Neu, Diann L. *Women's Rites: Feminist Liturgies for Life's Journey*. Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2003.

Newsom, Carol A. and Sharon H. Ringe, eds. *Women's Bible Commentary* (expanded edition). Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Nickoloff, James B., ed. *Gustavo Gutierrez: Essential Writings*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996.

Nash, James A. *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy*. New York: Harper & Row, 1963.

Nothwehr, Dawn, ed. *Franciscan Theology of the Environment: An Introductory Reader*. Quincy, IL: Franciscan Press, 2002.

Nussbaum, Martha C. *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011.

O'Brien, David J. and Thomas A. Shannon, eds. *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992.

O'Meara, Thomas F. *Thomas Aquinas: Theologian*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

Palacios, Joseph M. *The Catholic Social Imagination: Activism and the Just Society in Mexico and the United States*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 2007.

Pearce, Fred. *When the Rivers Run Dry: Water – The Defining Crisis of the Twenty-First Century*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2006.

Pegis, Anton C., ed. *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas*. New York: Random House, 1945.

Petty, Michael W. *A Faith That Loves the Earth*. New York: University Press, 1996.

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Human Rights and the Church: Historical and Theological Reflections*. Vatican City, 1990.

Rahner, Karl. *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. Translated by William V. Dych. New York: Crossroad, 1978.

Rawls, John. *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971.

Ray, Darby. *Incarnation and Imagination: A Christian Ethic of Ingenuity*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008.

Reardon, Geraldine, ed. *Women and the Environment*. Oxford: Oxfam, 1993.

Reid, Lucy. *She Changes Everything: Seeking the Divine on a Feminist Path*. New York: T & T Clark, 2005.

Ress, Mary Judith. *Ecofeminism in Latin America*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2006.

Ress, Mary Judith. *Without a Vision, the People Perish: Reflections on Latin American Ecofeminist Theology*. Santiago: The Con-spirando Collective, 2003.

Riley, Maria and Nancy Sylvester. *Trouble and Beauty: Women Encounter Catholic Social Teaching*. Washington, D.C.: Leadership Conference of Women Religious, 1991.

Robb, Carol S. *Wind, Sun, Soil, Spirit: Biblical Ethics and Climate Change*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010.

Rogers, Peter and Susan Leal. *Running Out of Water: The Looming Crisis and Solutions to Conserve Our Most Precious Resource*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010.

Ross, Susan A. *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology*. New York: Continuum, 1998.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Integrating Ecofeminism, Globalization, and World Religions*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation*. Boston: Beacon, 1995.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford, editor. *Woman Healing Earth: Third World Women on Ecology, Feminism, and Religion*. New York: Orbis Books, 1996.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "Ecofeminism: The Challenge to Theology" in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*. New York: Center for the Study of Religion, 2000.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. "Conclusion: Eco-Justice at the Center of the Church's Mission" in *Christianity and Ecology: Seeking the Well-Being of Earth and Humans*. New York: Center for the Study of Religion, 2000.

Salleh, Ariel, ed. *Eco-Sufficiency and Global Justice*: *Women Write Political Ecology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Schaefer, Jame, ed. *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2011.

Schaefer, Jame. *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts.* Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009.

Schneiders, Sandra M. *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*. Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1999.

Schwenk, Theodor and Wolfram Schwenk. *Water: The Element of Life*. New York: Anthroposophic Press, Inc., 1989.

Segovia, Fernando F., ed. *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2003.

Shiva, Vandana, ed. *Close to Home: Women Reconnect Ecology, Health and Development Worldwide*. Philadelphia: New Society, 1994.

Shiva, Vandana. "Development, Ecology and Woman" in *Readings in Ecology and Feminist Theology*. Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1995.

Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*. London: Zed Books, 1988.

Shiva, Vandana. *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution and Profit*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002.

Sigmund, Paul E., ed. and trans. *St. Thomas Aquinas on Politics and Ethics*. New York: Norton, 1988.

Smith, Christian. *The Emergence of Liberation Theology: Radical Religion and Social Movement Theory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Soelle, Dorothee. *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance*. Translated by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001.

Solomon, Robert C. and Mark C. Murphy, eds. *What Is Justice? Classic and Contemporary Readings*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Solomon, Steven. *Water: The Epic Struggle for Wealth, Power, and Civilization*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2010.

Sorrell, Roger D. *St. Francis of Assisi and Nature: Tradition and Innovation in Western Christian Attitudes toward the Environment*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.

Sowell, Thomas. *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*. New York: Free Press, 1999.

Spencer, Nick and Robert White. *Christianity, Climate Change and Sustainable Living*. London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2007.

Spring, David and Eileen Spring, eds. *Ecology and Religion in History*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.

Sullivan, Patrick J., Franklin J. Agardy, and James J. J. Clark. *The Environmental Science of Drinking Water*. Burlington: Elsevier, 2005.

Syme, Geoffrey, and Blair Nancarrow. "Justice and the Allocation of Benefits from Water" in *Social Alternatives,* 2008.

Thompson, Magdala, ed. *Full of Hope: Critical Social Perspectives on Theology*. New York: Paulist, 2003.

Toly, Noah J. and Daniel I. Block, eds. *Keeping God's Earth: The Global Environment in Biblical Perspective*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Global Climate Change: A Plea for Dialogue, Prudence, and the Common Good." Washington, D.C.: United States Catholic Conference, 2001.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. "Renewing the Earth: An Invitation to Reflection and Action on Environment in Light of Catholic Social Teaching", 1991.

Van Dyke, Fred. *Between Heaven and Earth: Christian Perspectives on Environmental Perspectives*. Denver: Praeger, 2010.

West, Traci C. *Disruptive Christian Ethics: When Racism and Women's Lives Matter*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006.

Whiteford, Linda and Scott Whiteford, eds. *Globalization, Water, and Health: Resource Management in Times of Scarcity*. Santa Fe: School of America Research Press, 2005.

Whiteley, John, Helen Ingram and Richard Warren Perry, editors. *Water, Place, & Equity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2008.

Winright, Tobias, ed. *Green Discipleship: Catholic Theological Ethics and the Environment*. Winona, MN: Anselm Academic, 2011.

VITA

Rachel Hart Winter is a Doctoral Candidate in Christian Ethics at Loyola University Chicago. Originally from Washington, DC, she has lived in Chicago for the past 10 years. Currently she is the Director of the St. Catherine of Siena Center at Dominican University. She graduated from Lehigh University with a Bachelor of Arts in Behavioral Neuroscience and earned a Master of Arts in Theological Studies degree at Loyola University Chicago. During her years at Loyola, she also worked in both University Ministry and at the Joan and Bill Hank Center for the Catholic Intellectual Heritage. She led the University Ministry Retreat Program, taking students to places such as Taize, France, to develop their own tools for spiritual discernment in our world today. Previously, she served as a Jesuit Volunteer in the Marshall Islands and as associate director and operations manager at Jesuit Volunteers International.

In addition to directing the Siena Center, Hart Winter serves on the Board of the Foundation for Adult Catechetical Teaching Aids and is a member of Alpha Sigma Nu: the Honor Society of Jesuit Colleges and Universities. She is also collaborating with a team of scholars on an interdisciplinary ecological and ethical textbook called *Healing Earth* through the International Jesuit Ecology Project. She is married to Patrick Winter, and has two sons, Joseph and Thomas.