

Dealing with our own sewage: Spirituality and Ethics in the Sustainability Agenda

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Steve de Gruchy <degruchys@ukzn.ac.za>

School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Theological reflection begins in the midst of the struggle for life. This is where God is at work. This is where the people of God find God and, in taking their clues from the Word – Christ as attested in Scripture – discern their historical vocation. Theology is critical reflection upon this praxis, both its successes and its failures.¹

Because of this I want to root the discussion of the spirituality and ethics of sustainability around the question of *sewage*. While this might sound awkward – embarrassing perhaps – it really is the place where economics and ecology collide in such a way that we can talk meaningfully about life and about sustainable communities. Outside of our ability to deal with our ‘shit’ there can be no real talk of sustainability. ‘Sustainability’ is simply another sexy word to which no one, not even George Bush, can object. It means everything to everyone, and so it means nothing.² We must ground the concept of sustainability in the material reality of people in the struggle for life. And so we begin at the bottom, with what threatens life today, sewage.

Three current news items

Three current news events in the Southern African context begin to define the contours of this agenda for me. The first is the way in which the post-apartheid ANC government in South Africa focused quite deliberately on eradicating the ‘bucket system’ of sewage collection. The bucket system involved human waste being collected in open buckets, and then taken away by the municipal workers. It only occurs in poor communities and it is a powerful reminder of what it means to be a second class citizen. In his State of the Nation Address in February 2006, the then President Thabo Mbeki said: “I should also mention that government has decided that we must completely eradicate, in the established settlements, the “bucket toilets” by the end of 2007”.³ Later that year, in August 2006, the minister of Water Affairs re-committed government to eradicating within a year the 155,000 buckets still in use in formal housing areas (not informal settlement).⁴ However, at the time of writing (December 2008) while the bucket system has been eradicated in the Western Cape, this national goal has not been met.⁵

¹ Thus Gutierrez’s classic definition, “Theology as critical reflection on praxis” in *A Theology of Liberation*. (London: SCM, Rev. Ed 2001) 50

² Even more meaningless is the term ‘sustainable development’, because ‘development’ is an even more vacuous term!

³ “State of the Nation Address of the President of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki: 3 February 2006” <<http://www.info.gov.za/speeches/2006/06020310531001.htm>> Accessed December 3, 2008

⁴ “Bucket system on track – Hendricks” *Cape Times*. August 16 2006. <http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=13&art_id=qw1155740763388B236> – Accessed: November 24, 2008

⁵ “No more bucket system for Cape” *Cape Times*. May 27 2008 http://www.iol.co.za/index.php?set_id=1&click_id=124&art_id=vn20080527055659107C192455 Accessed Nov 24. 2008

The second current event is the suspension in November 2008 of a top water scientist from South Africa's Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) just as he was about to deliver a paper that was perceived to be highly critical of government's managing of South Africa's water reserves. "The hard-hitting presentation by Dr Anthony Turton warned of an impending water quality disaster that had the potential to spark public violence."⁶ Turton pointed to a number of crucial issues to do with water quality, arguing that five of South Africa's major dams are contaminated with toxin levels that are among the highest in the world. He stated that no studies have been done on people exposed to chronic doses of microcystins, and that there is a growing antiretroviral load that is passing through people into rivers, entering the population either through the drinking-water stream or through produce irrigated with contaminated water. He also noted, rather chillingly, that South Africa has "no more water supplies and all economic development would be constrained by this".⁷ This verdict is supported by a current conference of the South African Cities Network Urban Conference, which pointed out that "South African cities will soon face major water shortages if they do not implement drastic measures to conserve this most precious liquid".⁸

The third event, unraveling as I write this paper, is the outbreak of Cholera in Zimbabwe where by early December 2008 the World Health Organisation reported on over 11,000 cases and 500 deaths.⁹ (By January this has reached 1800 deaths).¹⁰ The situation is caused by the complete breakdown in public health structures, water sanitation and governance. In order to control the epidemic in the capital, Harare, engineers simply closed off the water supply as they could no longer treat it.¹¹ They have urged people to boil water before using it, but people have no fire wood or electricity to do this. With many people moving across the border between Zimbabwe and South Africa, it has not taken long for the cholera epidemic to show up in parts of South Africa.¹² There are now clear indications that the Limpopo River is infected with cholera, with knock-on effects for Botswana and Mozambique.¹³

⁶ "CSIR suspends top water scientist" by Megan Power. *Sunday Times*. Published: Nov 23, 2008 <<http://www.thetimes.co.za/PrintEdition/Insight/Article.aspx?id=890387>> Accessed 1 Dec 2008

⁷ "CSIR mutes water quality talk". Independent Media.

⁸ "Cities must save water" by Bongani Mthembu in *The Witness*. 02 Dec 2008 <[http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global\[_id\]=16894](http://www.witness.co.za/index.php?showcontent&global[_id]=16894)> Accessed 3 December, 2008

⁹ "Zim cholera outbreak shows no sign of abating", *Mail and Guardian*, December 2, 2008. <<http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-12-02-zim-cholera-outbreak-shows-no-sign-of-abating>> Accessed December 3, 2008

¹⁰ "Call for world to assist Zim healthcare system", *Mail and Guardian*, January 13, 2009. <<http://www.mg.co.za/article/2009-01-13-call-for-world-to-assist-with-zim-healthcare-system>> Accessed January 14, 2009

11

"Zimbabwe cuts water supply to Harare". *Mail and Guardian* December 1, 2008.

<<http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-12-01-zimbabwe-cuts-water-supply-to-harare>> Accessed 3 December 2008

12

"Zimbabwe cholera outbreak spreads to South Africa", by [Andrew Geoghegan](#). Australian Broadcast Corporation. <<http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2008/12/03/2436181.htm>> Accessed 3 December 2008

¹³ Cholera found in Limpopo River SAPA. 02/12/2008 21:03 - (SA) <http://www.news24.com/News24/South_Africa/News/0,,2-7-1442_2436262,00.html> Accessed 3 December 2008

Sustainability and sewage

These three stories point to the fundamental crisis of sustainability that we face in southern Africa today – rising political and economic aspirations that legitimately demand an end to dehumanising living conditions (the bucket system), colliding with collapsing management of public assets and growing shortages of the earth's resources (water), and leading to an impending health disaster in which it is the poor who will die (cholera).

We are not the first to deal with this of course. Archeologists tell us that the Mesopotamian and Indus Valley civilizations were the first to try to deal with sewage, 3000 years before the common era. Every attempt to build a sustainable society has had to deal with this, and the development of the modern sewer system in Europe in the 19th century is directly related to the incidence of cholera – in Paris, London and Chicago.¹⁴ In fact the *British Medical Journal* in 2007 voted 'sanitation' as the greatest advance in medicine in the past 150 years, eclipsing even the discovery of antibiotics and anesthesia.¹⁵

If sustainability means anything then it means finding a way out of the tension noted in the three stories, so that our children and their children will live a human and humane life on God's earth. How do we transcend the dehumanization of the bucket system, when a move to water borne sewage in a water stressed country, opens us to the problem of not being able to flush our problems away? How do we manage our waste and our water so that the poor do not die of cholera? How do we do this, further, in a situation in which the impact of Structural Adjustment Policies, neo-liberal globalisation, the privatization of public structures, and corruption and false priorities in business and the civil service has weakened the inability of the Nation State to provide the basic necessities for its citizens?

Our thinking about sustainability must deal with sewage because we have to live with our waste. It cannot leave the globe. It hangs around and it comes back to haunt us. Previous civilizations may have got away with flushing the problem downstream, but in a globalized world there is no downstream – or more correctly, "we all live downstream".¹⁶ There is one stream of water from which we all drink, and any sustainable world has to come to terms with this fact. As Kenneth Boulding saw forty years ago, we are no longer living with the endless possible frontiers of a 'cowboy economy', but have to take seriously what it means to live in the confines of a 'spaceship economy':¹⁷ David Korten puts it like this: "we live on a spaceship, not an ocean liner. A spaceship has no lifeboat. Its occupants either prosper or perish together".¹⁸ This is the sum total of what we have,

¹⁴ See <<http://www.sewerhistory.org>>

¹⁵ "Sanitation a Top Medical Milestone : More Than 150 Years of Medical Marvels: Sanitation Voted the Greatest Advance Since 1840" By DAVID KATZ, M.D. ABC News Medical Unit.
<http://www.sewerhistory.org/articles/wh_era/brit_med_journal_contest/Sanitation.pdf>
Accessed Dec 5, 2008

¹⁶ This is a recurring theme in the book, Tara Lohan (ed) *Water Consciousness*. (San Francisco: Alternet books, 2008).

¹⁷ Kenney Boulding, "The economics of the coming spaceship earth" in David Korten and Rudi Klauss (eds) *People Centred Development: Contributions towards Theory and Planning Frameworks* (Westhartford: Kumarian Press, 1984) 63-73

¹⁸ David Korten, *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1990) 135

and quite literally just like the international space shuttle, if we want to be sustainable, we have to learn to deal with our waste.¹⁹

Beyond the liberation/creation impasse

Where do we find the spiritual resources to do this? What is it within our Christian tradition that will enable us to engage with this in real life, knee deep in the shit as it were, so that ordinary people are able to live the lives that God wants them to live? In other words: how do we align God's preferential option for the poor with the fact that the diseases born of our waste (along with the wider impact of the earth crisis) also take a preferential option for the poor? How do we face up to the fact that it is not just human greed and rampant consumerism that is in conflict with the earth, but also the legitimate human aspirations of the poor – to have food, to have water, to keep warm, to have adequate sanitation? How do we hear both the cry of the poor, and the cry of the earth and not play these off against each other, to the detriment of both?²⁰

What these stories illustrate and what this question points to is that neither an economic model, nor an ecological model, are in themselves sufficient. We need both. Rather than just a brown agenda that focuses on poverty, or a green agenda that focuses on the environment, we need an *olive agenda* that blends both and finds a new way of being human that recognises that the earth does not belong to us but that we belong to the earth.²¹ Our spirituality needs to be in service to this olive agenda, or it will soon be found wanting.

The development of the *oikos* motif in some contemporary theological work is pushing in this direction.²² This Greek word for 'homestead' is the root word for economics (*oikos nomos*) and ecology (*oikos logos*), and is a powerful reminder that the earth is one home for all of us. And because we inhabit one homestead, an ethics of sustainability means that our economic systems, our way of ordering human production, consumption and waste management, have to find a way to be aligned to the ecological rhythms of the earth. These systems have to take seriously the fact that "we all live downstream", and no amount of technological innovation can change that.

Larry Rasmussen has noted that the awareness of this interconnectedness is precisely what is missing today. The *Big* economy, neo-liberal globalized capitalism, works against the

¹⁹ Intriguingly enough, at the precise time of writing, in a parable for what I am saying here, the Space Shuttle Endeavour is delivering a new toilet to the International Space Station, one that will recycle all water including urine in the interests of long-term sustainability. "Shuttle Is Carrying Destiny's New Toilet" By Joel Achenbach. Washington Post Staff Writer Saturday, November 15, 2008; Page A02. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/11/14/AR2008111400857.html>> Accessed 5 December 2008

²⁰ Thus, Leonardo Boff *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor* (ET Maryknoll: Orbis, 1997)

²¹ See my essay, "An Olive Agenda: First thoughts on a metaphorical theology of development" *The Ecumenical Review*, WCC Geneva. Vol 59:2&3 April/July 2007. 333-345

²² See *The Oikos Journey: a theological reflection on the economic crisis in South Africa*. published by the Diakonia Council of Churches, Durban South Africa. Available at <<http://www.diakonia.org.za/documents/OikosA5e.pdf>>

Great economy,²³ a term he borrows from Wendell Berry²⁴. This latter economy is the *oikos-nomos* that sustains the earth, and has done so for thousands upon thousands of years. Both Berry and Rasmussen thus point out the absolute necessity for our daily economic life to function in harmony with the Great Economy or we will land up in shit (although he uses a more polite term!). Rasmussen writes:

Economic production and consumption, as well as human reproduction, are unsustainable when they no longer fall within the borders of nature's regeneration. So the Bottom Line below the Bottom Line is that if we don't recognize that the laws of economics and the laws of ecology are finally the same laws, we are in deep doo-doo. Eco/nomics is the only way possible.²⁵

Given this, it would seem to me that a spirituality and ethics for sustainability should be moving beyond a one-sided reliance on the *liberation* motif of the Exodus with its predominantly economic motif, or a one-sided reliance on the *creation* motif of the first chapters of Genesis with its predominantly ecological motif. The liberation motif is a motif of getting away, of flight, of leaving one's problems behind, of *exodus*. But a spirituality for sustainability has to find a tradition of rootedness, of belonging, of sticking around, of taking responsibility. The creation motif is a motif of beauty and goodness, of innocence and wonder. But a spirituality for sustainability has to find a motif that honours the earth *after* the fall, in the face of sin, and labour, and enmity, and cholera.

But more than this, other than in a few cases,²⁶ neither motif finds space for the other and so tends to polarize the problem into either an economic struggle for liberation, or an ecological struggle for the environment, a brown agenda or a green agenda. This polarization misses the point of the one *oikos*, of eco/nomics, of the need for an olive agenda. And, as our stories suggest, what ordinary men and women are facing in southern Africa cannot be separated into either of these separate silos. Bucket toilets, cholera and water shortages are about poverty and therefore economics, and are therefore they must be high on the brown agenda. At the same time they are about water and sanitation and therefore ecology, and are therefore must be high on the green agenda. These struggles are about the *oikos*, the one homestead in which humanity lives. Only an integrated spirituality drawing on an integrated vision, something akin to an olive agenda, can provide us with clues for sustainability.

A Jordan river motif?

As we turn to the biblical tradition, I therefore want to suggest that we might gain something by exploring a *Jordan River* motif in search of such a spirituality and ethics in service of the sustainability agenda. Here I am thinking of the image of standing before the Jordan River and taking responsibility for what it means to live in the land that one is

²³ See the chapter, "The Big Economy and the Great Economy" in Larry Rasmussen, *Earth Community, Earth Ethics* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996) 111 - 126.

²⁴ See Wendell Berry's essay "Two Economies" first published in *Home Economics* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987) 54 - 75. The reference here is to the reprint in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* (Washington DC: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2002) 219 - 235.

²⁵ Rasmussen, "The Big Economy", 112. The use of the term Bottom Line is borrowed from Thomas Berry, and the neologism *eco/nomics* from William Ashworth.

²⁶ I am thinking here of the work of Boff, *Cry of the Earth* and Ivone Gebara, *Longing for Running Water: Ecofeminism and Liberation* (ET Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999)

entering. I am thinking of a people who have been given a law about how to live with their neighbours, to tend the earth, to regulate their economic system, to treat their animals, to take time off, all in such a way that they might 'live long on the land'. It is a vision for sustainability that seeks to balance the economic with the ecological, and it is rooted in a spirituality of respect of the liberating God who hates slavery while being concerned for the land at the same time. It is the place where the liberation motif and the creation motif come together, not in some romantic time before history began, but in the reality of human struggles in history. It is a spirituality and an ethic for the one oikos that we inhabit.²⁷

There are clear limitations to linking the Jordan river to the 'Promised Land' of course as the history of the religious legitimation of colonial land grabbing and 'manifest destiny' suggests.²⁸ The Promised Land tradition can also be extremely patriarchal and has been used in the service of ethno-racism.²⁹ As with all traditions, metaphors and symbols it hides something even as it discloses; yet there are creative ways of working the motif that asks questions about the lack of justice to be found in the Canaanite city states and about the emergence of the liberating Yahweh tradition amongst the poor. Some have suggested that its meaning can be reclaimed if it turned around to be "Land of Promise" rather than Promised Land, and there is some truth to that. In this sense, there are liberating uses of the Promised Land tradition as Martin Luther King jr. has shown,³⁰ and connections with the eschatological vision of the coming Kingdom.³¹

But the Jordan river motif holds a number of other creative possibilities too. It is about water, obviously, and it links the *living* water of the Sea of Galilee to the *dying* water of the Dead sea. And it does so in the context of human choice, human responsibility, human praxis focused on the question of sustainability, of one's descendents living long in the land. This water itself is ambiguous. You go one way and you get to life; another way and you get to death. So standing before the waters that connect life with death, Moses puts it simply: "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live." (Deut 30:19)

After forty years of life in the water-stressed context of the Arabian desert, Moses is aware that the water of the Jordan can be overwhelmingly seductive.³² But, as in the Garden of

²⁷ The initial jolt that towards this way of thinking was provided by Wendell Berry in his essay, "The Gift of Good Land" published in *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays of Wendell Berry* (Washington DC: Shoemaker and Hoard, 2002), 295

²⁸ See the classic essay, by Robert Allen Warrior, "A Native American Perspective: Canaanites, Cowboys, and Indians," in *Voices From the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; Maryknoll: Orbis, 1995), 277-85.

²⁹ See the discussion in Dunbar Moodie, *The Rise of Afrikanerdom: Power, Apartheid and Afrikaner Civil Religion* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1975).

³⁰ See the speech he delivered on the eve of his assassination, "I see the promised land" in James M. Washington, *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings of Martin Luther King Jr.* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1986) p 279-286

³¹ Jurgen Moltmann was the first to alert us to this in *Theology of Hope* (London: SCM, 1977) See especially chapter 2, "Promise and History".

³² I am more than aware that the Deuteronomic story of Moses on the edge of the Jordan is a later textual reconstruction. In his classic commentary, *Deuteronomy*, (ET. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966), Gerhard von Rad calls the role of Moses in the text a 'fiction'. "It really is a fiction. In fact, these sermons are addressed to the Israel of the later period of the monarchy". p.28. But that is the point! The fact that the story outlives its

Eden, humanity has to learn again that the earth is to be treated with respect. The water flows from life (Galilee), but it flows to death (Dead sea). The path between life and death is to be navigated through human moral choice. And as the content of Deuteronomy suggests, this moral choice is about lifestyle, culture, land, economy, justice.³³ It is even about how to defecate (see 23:13)! It is about linking the economic with the ecological within the one oikos. It is the foundation for an olive agenda (quite literally too – see Deut 8:8 and 28:40) !

Jordan River ethics

What are some of the possible implications of the Jordan River motif for our spirituality and ethics? Recognizing that “we all live downstream”, and that between the waters of life and the waters of death lies the path of human choice (Deut 30:19), here we can mention five ethical principles that begin to flesh out what that choice might mean for the struggle for life in the face of sewage, water shortages and cholera.

(i) *Responsibility.* The Jordan River motif balances freedom ‘from’ with freedom ‘to’. Exodus celebrates a freedom ‘from’ – from slavery, bondage, oppression, poverty, injustice, unfreedom. Liberation struggles focus on the constraints that must be removed – but the earth crisis involves a recognition that environmental constraints are legitimate constraints. We cannot be free ‘from’ water, from top soil, from clean air, from sewage. We all live downstream, and we cannot be free from that reality. There remain things that we need to be set free ‘from’, from hunger, racism, HIV and AIDS, gender based violence. The Land of Promise is that land in which such freedom is anticipated. Yet it is also the place where we need to be free ‘to’ live in a way that respects the constraints and limitations that the earth provides. No one fights a liberation struggle with the aim of taking control of one’s own sewage, but - as the Zimbabwean situation has shown - this is precisely the ethical responsibility that comes with freedom.

(ii) *The commons.* The Jordan River motif points to the land - the earth - as a communal gift rather than as private property. One of the ways in which the biblical tradition differs from the many conquest traditions which have claimed it’s sanction is that the land that was conquered was not to become private property. It was a gift from God, it belonged to God. As Leviticus has it, “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants.” (25:23) The Land of Promise is a gift, a public space, common property. The Sabbath and Jubilee laws draw from this fundamental position, as does the command to care for strangers and aliens. In this understanding of the gift of the land, we see the deep inter-relationship between economy and ecology, the concerns of the poor and the concerns of the earth.

(iii) *Legal limitations.* The Jordan River motif is a rules-based motif. The Ten Commandments – along with the wider Torah - served as a binding legal framework for

historic moment suggests that the motif has a surplus of meaning (Ricoeur) that touches something deep within human spirituality in search of sustainability.

³³ The tragic irony of this should not be lost on us. A key element in the continued Israeli military occupation of Palestine has to do with the control of water, ensuring that good water flows to Israel and unsafe water to Palestine and other neighbouring Arab states. See the chapter “Palestine: Poisoning the Wells of Peace” in Fred Pearce *When the Rivers Run Dry: What happens when our water runs out.* (London: Transworld Publishers, Random House, 2006), 183-193.

social life together in the Land of Promise. There was to be no Free Market, but rather the community had rules to govern and control the economy. In the light of the complexities of modern life we may find that we need a wider set of legal rules, but they need to serve the same purpose: to bind the strong and to limit the powerful. They remind us that our rulers are not gods, and that all stand under the judgment of the law, and that there are things that must not be done for the sake of both humanity and the earth. These legal limitations - respect the Sabbath, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness - provide a touchstone against which politics and economics and socio-cultural life can be evaluated; and in so doing the give birth to a vibrant prophetic tradition which speaks truth to power.

(iv) Vocation. As Moses makes it clear on the eve of the crossing of the Jordan, each citizen is called to give account for their life as a contribution to the common good, both here and now, and in an intergenerational sense as well (Deut 30:19). The task is not to control, accumulate, consume, and waste; but to live in harmony with the land and one's neighbours, assist those in need, honour the wealth of the wider community rather than private wealth, and take responsibility for one's waste. And this is a task that must keep an eye on the inheritance that society is leaving for the next generation, one's children and one's children's children. Whilst contemporary society heaps praise upon billionaire CEOs, bankers, film stars and sports stars, a Jordan River ethic honours teachers, nurses, community organisers, social activists, farmers, protectors of wilderness, mountains, rivers and seas, and engineers using technology in the service of the common good - including those maintaining the sewage systems that honour our humanity and the earth.

(v) Celebration. Rooted strongly within the Jordan River motif is the idea of communal commemoration, of remembering, of celebrating. Even a simple reading of the Torah makes clear the liturgical and cultic framework that is to guide life in the Land of Promise. It is also obvious that much of this serves as a legitimization of the priestly class. But there is a truth that lies deeper than this, namely, that living across the Jordan is not just to do with responsibility, law, and vocation. It is also to do with gift, promise, and celebration. These celebrations are related both to the history of liberation (The Passover - Ex 34:18), and to the rhythms of creation (The Festival of Weeks - Ex 34:22), a reminder of that freedom from slavery and freedom to enjoy the milk and honey of the land are both rooted in God's graciousness. An ethic that honours freedom in this way, understands music, dance, art, celebration.

Water, Sewage, Cholera,

We began in the midst of the struggle for life - against the dehumanisation of the bucket system, cholera in Zimbabwe, and a threatened water supply. How would a Jordan River ethics and spirituality assist us to engage with this reality? Here we can offer a few pointers to stimulate a conversation.

First, to enhance human dignity and to protect the vulnerable against disease, post-liberation societies have to deal with their shit. It is clear that the bucket system, along with other unhealthy systems of sewage collection, have to be eradicated in the name of freedom.

The question as to whether this should follow a water-borne system, using fresh and clean water raises three possibilities: either we need to move to non-water systems, or to grey water systems, or we have to strengthen our water cleaning capacity and live with the fact that we need to re-use water over and over again.

Water systems and sewage systems belong in the common domain. They have to remain a public good supported by public systems, because they have to do with life, freedom and dignity. Privatisation of water and of sewage is to be resisted, because profits cannot be put above human dignity.

The development of public capacity is therefore crucial. Those who believe in freedom have to encourage good people to take up vocations as public servants, scientists, engineers, technicians, public health workers who can provide the leadership and know-how to protect our water and deal with our sewage.

Alongside this, legal constraints have to be brought to bear on the large users of water: industrial agriculture, industry; and – particularly in countries like South Africa – where the disjuncture between those who use lots of water for gardens, washing, swimming pools, golf courses – and those who have little water is so great.

And finally, because we all live downstream we have to all grasp the freedom to live responsibly with water. Harvesting rain water, turning off taps, fixing leaks, planting indigenous gardens, minimizing water waste – and holding our politicians and civil servants to account for their role in protecting our common life together.

The Jordan River motif is a biblical tradition that invites a spirituality of taking responsibility for the land for one's children and one's children's children. It is a rules-based tradition in which law binds the rich and the powerful, reminding them that they are not gods. It gives rise to a prophetic tradition which speaks truth to power. It reminds us of the gift of the earth, and of the importance of the common good, celebrating those who find their vocation in serving this wider good. It is a spirituality of song and dance and art, responding to the rhythms of the earth's seasons. In recognising that we all live downstream, it knows that freedom from bondage is nothing if it does not come with the responsibility to tend one's garden, respect both the neighbour and the stranger, and deal with one's own shit.