



Reflections of Morning Prayers (23rd March 2015)
Ecumenical Center, Geneva
Commemorating the World Water Day 2015

- by Dinesh Suna¹

Scripture readings: Genesis 1:1-5 ; Revelation 21:1-6

Water has a deep spiritual significance in most of the religion. It is more so, when it comes to the Christian faith. There are numerous instances of water mentioned in the Bible. It begins with water in Genesis and it ends with Revelation, as we just read. The bible talks about the physical water that we drink and it also talks about it as a metaphor, when Jesus tells the Samaritan woman at the well "the water I give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life".

Even though access to safe drinking water is recognised by the United Nations as a human right, almost a billion people around the world do not have access to this life giving resource. By 2025, 3 billion people, almost half of world's population will be living in water stressed countries. Even though 2/3rd of earth is covered with water, the fresh water availability for human consumption, is less than 1%. Even then, the issue of water crisis is not about **scarcity** but of **accessibility**, control and equitable distribution. It's a pilgrimage towards water **justice!**

As we prepare ourselves for the pilgrimage towards water justice, book of Revelation is a significant resource. It says, "And the first earth had passed away and the sea was no more" (Rev. 21:1). There is no sea in the redeemed earth. Reflecting on this, in one of the reflections of Seven Weeks for Water 2014, Dr George Zachariah² of India asks, "when we struggle together to restore and redeem our water bodies, John's vision talks about the absence of the sea in the new dispensation. How do we understand this vision? John in this chapter gives a series of items that are said to be "no more" in the new earth. No more death, no more mourning, and no more weeping and pain. Why is sea listed in Revelation along with death, pain, tears, and mourning? How can we accept the absence of sea in the redeemed earth"? He further goes on to say, "Revelation portrays sea as a political and economic category—the symbol of systemic evil. The disappearance of sea in the New Jerusalem is hence a critique of the political economy of the Roman Empire. Sea was the means for the Roman imperial power to plunder the colonized communities and their land." Therefore, in the "new earth" there is no place for imperial powers. However John was using "sea" as a metaphor to denounce the imperial powers and not literally envisaging a new world without the sea, as it is equally important for sustenance of marine life and ecosystem and to replenish the fresh water, as the rivers are.

Coming back to the global water crisis, in the water stressed countries, often it is the poor and marginalised communities who bear the brunt of water crisis, and

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² http://water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/seven-weeks-for-water/past/2014/2014_1_Foretaste_of_a_Redeemed_Earth.pdf

particularly the women who walk miles to fetch water. In a globalised world, water is not looked at as a vital resource essential for sustenance of life, but only as a commodity which should be marketed for profit. Water is no more a common good, but it has been auctioned to many multinational corporations, who then abuse the water for profit and deny the poor, access to water. The Chhattishgarh State in India sold 6 rivers to corporates. The Sheonath river was leased to a steel plant for token Re.1/- per annum for a period of 22 years, while thousands in that area went thirsty³. In Plachimada , Kerala, India, Coca Cola had to shut down its manufacturing units, after severe protests by the community, as the company's bottling unit led to excessive ground water depletion in the region. This year's reflection of the [Seven Weeks for Water](#) campaign talks about these.

Living in a city like Geneva, where availability of water is plenty, we never give it a second thought before using the water in our houses or at our work place. We open the tap and the water is there. In Geneva, the water bills are included with the rent, irrespective of our consumption, we are charged a nominal fixed amount per household. Whereas some of the water stressed countries including Palestine , many have to pay upto 2/3rd of their income for water⁴.

The EWN continues to remind us that though the tap water in Geneva is safe to drink, many of us also buy bottled water for our personal use as well as for our meetings.

In the bible there are several instances including the Revelations, we just read, where it reminds us that, water is a gift of God and that it should be a free gift. Economic criteria should not determine who can access and afford this life giving resource.

Is it possible that water for basic sustenance of life can be free? Recently in Delhi, India a new political party known as Aam Aadmi Party (Common Man's Party) came to power for the second time. As they had one when they came to power for the first time, they declared again, water to be free for all, upto 700 litres per household/day. If one crosses the ceiling, will have to pay for the whole month's actual expenses as per the meter. This shows that without succumbing to the market forces, it is possible for a government to give water to the poor free of cost.

Yesterday, 22nd March we celebrated World Water Day, with the theme "Water & Sustainable Development". Water is an important component of sustainable development which affects, food, health, gender, education, energy and ensures quality of life. Hopefully the policy makers would see the same vision of John and share this precious gift- water of life with the needy, in an affordable manner if not free of cost. Amen.

³ http://archive.tehelka.com/story_main48.asp?filename=Ne290111Thewater.asp

⁴ <http://water.oikoumene.org/en/whatwedo/news-events/exposure-to-the-water-situation-in-gaza>